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## Peter Stott's Dream.

BY JEAN MIDDLEMASS.

LIKE Rip Van Winkle, Peter Stott fell asleep. He slept for fifty years. Comfortably seated in his large arm-chair, with a many-coloured silk handkerchief thrown over his rubicund countenance, did this excellent and amiable *pater-familias* compose himself for a post-prandial nap. The house was quiet; his numerous progeny, believing him to be at rest, were pursuing their various avocations, little suspecting the vicissitudes through which their respected parent was about to pass, or how far away from the daily calculation of his brewing accounts the very imbibing of the potent liquor made in his own vats was about to conduct him.

It is a darkened chamber, the gloom being made apparent by two mould candles, with snuffs towering up into a sort of castle. On a bed at one end of the room there lies a woman; she is very still—so still as almost to suggest the presence of Death; but an old, almost imbecile attendant, fussing about among the curtains of the huge four-post bedstead, feebly suggests the existence of life. Peter Stott is in that room, he is gazing on the scene, believing in his own invisibility, till the quaint-looking, infirm nurse touches him with a cold, clammy hand.

‘It’s ae yer ain wark, and it’s no a canny one,’ she says, in a broad North Country accent.

It seems to sting and rouse him as though a wasp had fastened itself on his sensitive flesh. He puts out one hand with a rapid gesture, to brush off the importunate insect—but the old hag has been stinging for a lifetime, and she knows how powerful an attribute is pertinacity. She turns down the bed-clothes and reveals the face of the motionless patient. It is white and rigid, but with wide-open eyes, which seem to gaze hopelessly into space.

Peter Stott stands absorbed in contemplation.

‘Will ye no speak to the puir lassie? maybe the voice of ye will bring her to herself.’

As under a spell he complies, and whispers: ‘Alice, Alice,’ in a sepulchral tone that strikes terror into his own heart. The hag was right; it reaches the sleeper, for she moves restlessly, and holds out her hands as though seeking some object. Peter advances one step nearer the bed, but the old woman waves him back.

'Dinna touch her—yer touch were death!' she says authoritatively; 'ye maun look and speak, but ye maunna feel.'

A heavy footstep is heard on the stairs as he stands wavering whether he shall comply with or be disobedient to the old woman's behests. An unmistakable Esculapius enters, wearing black silk stockings, knee-breeches, a swallow-tailed coat, and his hair in a queue; he feels the patient's pulse, using as he does so a silver watch on such a scale of magnitude that it would be impossible for it to go wrong for want of room for the works to move.

'A feeble spark of vitality remains,' he says unctuously.

'Try galvanism,' suggests Peter Stott, who shivers every time he hears his own voice. The man of medicine turns and looks at him with an expression partaking of wonder and contempt.

'Though it is true that Galvani invented a system by which electric shocks might be given in the year—say 1790—yet you must be aware that it is utterly impossible to carry about the immense machine necessary for the purpose.'

'Fool!' thinks Stott; 'why, I cured myself of the toothache the other day by means of a galvanic battery no bigger than a woman's workbox!' but he is too much impressed by the gravity of the situation to speak.

'Bleeding or blisters?' murmurs the doctor, as though querying with himself which were most likely to kill; the remark seems to have reached even the sick woman's dulled senses, for she starts up in bed with a sudden shriek, and looks wildly round her. The spark of life burns more brightly as she recognises Peter, and she beckons to him. Looking utterly ashamed both of himself and the part he is enacting, with a measured step he approaches; she throws her arms round him as though she would strangle him in a strong embrace.

'My father!' she cries; 'go, bring my father here;' then with another fearful shriek she releases him and falls back on the pillows. Beads of cold perspiration stand on Peter's brow; he shakes from head to foot as in the same awed whisper, which never fails to scare himself as he hears it, he says to the doctor—

'Try anæsthetics—chloroform—anything to quiet her.'

Esculapius regards him superciliously—he, being content with the lights of his day, has never looked into the mirror which shall reveal coming events; what knows he of anæsthetics? He deems Peter mad.

'Go and send a messenger to the lady's father,' is the practical suggestion, 'if you know where he is to be found.'

'I will telegraph at once,' cries Peter as he rushes down the stairs, while Esculapius, with a Burleigh shake, mutters *sotto voce*—

'Another patient—blister on the head—strait waistcoat—Bedlam!'

Once in the street, Peter rushes heedlessly on; it is dark, almost pitch-dark, yet he is in a well-known London thoroughfare, but it is so dimly lighted by oil lamps that he fails to recognise it. A policeman will set him right.

'Half-past twelve, and a rainy night!' croaks the hoarse voice of the watchman, as he emerges from his little sentry-box at the corner of a street.

'Fool! he isn't any use at all,' murmurs Peter; 'I thought that race of idiots had become extinct. Where the deuce is the telegraph office? Ah, the railway station—Victoria, that will be about the mark,' and on he strides, into space as it appears. The Victoria Station is unreachable, for the very reason that it is non-existent; still the air seems peopled with demons urging him with all speed to find Alice's father; and pursuing him unceasingly, he rushes on, on, on, without being any nearer the desired goal; altogether, he is travelling in a new country—what can it mean? Surely he knows every street, every stone in London, and the Victoria Station is close to his own house. Gone—bodily gone—nothing but open spaces—swamps, and bricks and mortar; yet the old man must be communicated with. Great Heaven, what shall he do? Ask an imbecile watchman—there is no one else about.

'Coach for B—— starts from the "Green Man and Still" about six in the morning or thereaway; there ain't no quicker means of communication as I knows on.'

'Pooh, you benighted idiot! who wants a coach when there are telegraphs and railways? I have missed my way; just tell me which is the turning to take to the station.'

'Never heard of no station, nor no means of conveyance but coaches and posts.'

'Well, tell me at least where I shall find a cab.'

'Whatever's that?'

'The man is drunk, there is no doubt of it—why, a hired carriage, idiot!'

'Oh, a hackney coach; they don't ply by night unless you orders 'em.'

'Good Heaven, am I going mad?' and Peter Stott hurries on without waiting for further colloquy. He sees a light in the window of a public-house close by; the twelve o'clock closing regulation had evidently not come into effect.

'Pen, ink, and paper,' he demands excitedly. 'I will write a scrawl and put it in the post; it will be delivered by the middle of the day—'

It is quickly done.

'An envelope,' he asks.

'Now, that is a thing as I never was asked for before, and don't rightly know what it be; if it's sealing-wax, it's welcome you are,' says the landlord.

Peter Stott is too angry to answer, but bunglingly folds his missive and seals it; then, fumbling in his pocket-book, produces a penny stamp, which he places on the right-hand corner in prescribed form.

The landlord takes up the letter, bursts into a great guffaw of laughing, and passes it round to several of the bystanders, who indulge in an equal amount of hilarity.

'What the devil do you mean?' asks Peter indignantly; 'it is my belief everyone has gone mad.'

'You are an escaped lunatic yourself,' remarks the jocose landlord; 'wherever did you get that thing? Postage one penny, and a woman's head; he's an impostor, my mates, that's what he is. He is trying some devil's wiles on us, and wants to get us all into trouble.'

'Sorry a fear—we'll hustle him, master,' and the small half-tipsy crowd surrounds Peter.

Frightened out of his life, he assumes a bravery he in no wise feels.

'Leave hold of me!' he cries; 'I am an influential man and a magistrate, and I am not going to deny the Queen—God bless her—for such rabble as you.'

But his words add fury to the tumult already at its commencement. They hiss, and shout, and spit at him till he is livid either from rage or fright, and the landlord is compelled to interfere.

'Quiet, quiet, mates; he has been drinking till he is besotted. Pity when liquor takes the form of political rashness. Them as is better and wiser than you, young man, was locked up t'other day for saying as our good king was 'a fat Adonis of fifty,' and you come flaunting a gay Queen in our faces—out upon you!'

'I am neither mad nor drunk, and I'm as ready to swear that Victoria is Queen of England as I was ten minutes ago,' says Peter stoutly.

These words bring matters to a crisis, and the whole assembly sets upon Peter, who for dear life's sake bolts out of the tavern, leaving the objectionable missive on the table. But they are not content with hunting him forth; they pursue him with shouting and execrations; threaten him with a ducking in a horse-pond; but somehow he manages to outstrip them, and now, thanking the dim lamps which he had abused but a brief space ago, he sits

down in a dark, slushy corner, grateful for a moment in which to breathe. But the demons who people the air around him do not leave him long: 'Alice's father, Alice's father—the only reparation you can make now is to find him!' they repeat in chorus, and Peter raises his weary limbs and walks a few paces slowly, as though clogs were bound about his ankles and impeded his progress. Where is he to go—what is he to do? He does not know, for the world seems to be turned topsy-turvy. If it were only daylight the drunken folk might grow sober, and be able to give him rational answers. Even as he desires it, the black paraphernalia of night is drawn up like a mantle by an unseen hand, and he finds himself in Regent Street at noonday. 'Alice's father,' still whisper his attendant demons.

'Pooh, nonsense! why will they gibber? Nothing is easier now that it is light,' and he looks round askance, but there is still something wrong about the world—no omnibuses, no hansoms, nothing but heavy, antiquated-looking conveyances. 'Is it a bank-holiday perchance, and so the usual traffic is stopped? Of course not; why, it would be doubled. Such clothes, too, as the people wear! Talk of legs—the women's dresses are short enough in all conscience, and the men in their drab gaiters and swallow-tail coats look as if they had been on a visit to Noah.' He is standing near a large print shop, and he looks curiously into the window; not a photograph of a pretty actress to be seen—and the good *pater-familias* is wont to regale himself with just that peep into a forbidden land which photograph shops reveal; nothing can be seen but large engravings and some H.B. caricatures of Lord Melbourne, Sir Francis Burdett, and such-like; they do not interest him in the least, so he starts once more on his search for Alice's father, but every instant the object he has in view merges into a fresh phase of wonder. He turns down Waterloo Place, along Cockspur Street, walking very fast; he is evidently making for the Charing Cross Station. Arrived at the spot where it should be, he stands stock-still and looks round him utterly bewildered; a very different building meets his eye, while an unmistakably fishy odour regales his nostrils. Hungerford Market in all its busy prosperity is before him, as it was before railroads and steam with their resistless power knocked down houses and streets, and possessed themselves of many a time-honoured edifice.

Bewildered by the noise of selling and bargaining, he turns disgusted away, and pursues his road along the Strand till he reaches Temple Bar. Ah, here he is quite at home; 'the ruthless hand of innovation has not interfered with this remnant of antiquity'; and, as Peter stands and gazes while the demons about

his brain are still whispering of Alice's father, a man of cadaverous appearance in wig and gown passes him out of the Inns of Court close by. This man looks sage and staid; he will accost him, and perhaps obtain the solution of all this mystery.

'Pardon me, sir, but did it ever happen to you to be lost in London?' asks Peter meekly.

'As a youth, when I first came up to read for the Bar, frequently; but now I am, I fancy, pretty well versed in the intricacies of the great city,' says the stranger, smiling.

'Don't be too trustful. Yesterday I thought I knew every street, every court; to-day it seems to me as if I were in another city.'

'Softening of the brain,' murmurs the barrister.

Peter becomes instantly angry.

'Why should everyone imagine me to be mad or drunk?' he says; 'I am as much in my sober senses as you are, and I took you for a wise man. You wear the outward garb of knowledge, and I expected you to have informed me why no one knows aught of Telegraphy, Penny Postage, Railways, and Hansom cabs.'

The man of law shook his head as Esculapius had done.

'I see,' he says contemplatively, 'you are one of those visionaries who puzzle your brain over coming events. England in the future, young man, depend on it, will not be so very far in advance of the England of to-day. Because a tea-kettle boils till evaporation produces steam, is that any reason why steam in the future is to be our motive power? It were not science but witchcraft that were necessary to produce such a result.'

'But I tell you I have travelled on scores of railways; it is absurd to say they are unsuccessful.'

Still the barrister looks incredulous.

'To what a state of dementia will not fallacy conduct us!' he observes sadly.

Peter Stott loses all patience.

'You don't believe in railways and the power of steam!' he cries indignantly; 'you are as behind your time as the rest of the ignorant crowd I have met of late. What has happened to you all? Railways, Telegraphy, Penny Postage, Galvanism, Anæsthetics—why, I ask you plainly, how could the great machinery of life work without them? You might as well tell me there is no Freedom of the Press, no Cheap Literature, no Free Trade, no Ritualism, no Mormonism, no Divorce!'

A ghastly smile plays once more on the features of the man of law.

'There is a method in your madness, my friend,' he says sadly:

these last-named evils are the inevitable result of the first-named innovations. Let us hope that in our time science will not make the rapid strides fanaticism leads some people to predict, especially as a vaster amount of civilization will only be provocative of demoralisation.'

'This is past all permission,' cries Peter Stott, scratching his head; 'is no impression to be made on anyone?'

'And all this while Alice lies dying!' murmur the demons in horrid chorus.

'Ay, yes, tell me, sir, which is the quickest way to communicate with a gentleman at B——? His daughter is dying.'

'Give the guard of the coach a donation—he will take a letter for you. It is cheaper than the post. B—— is fifty miles, and the postage twopence halfpenny a mile, unless you happen to have a friend who will frank your letter.'

He evidently deems Stott to be at the least in a state of bewilderment, and he instructs him as though he were a child.

'Franks be hanged!' shouts perplexed Peter, and, leaving the stranger in utter astonishment, he starts off once more in his vain search for Alice's father. It is useless—he cannot find a single individual who will agree with him or even listen to him; he tramps and tramps till his feet swell and his shoes pinch, but utterly in vain; not one of the oft-frequented railway stations or telegraph offices can he see.

'There he is, there's the poor maniac!' shouts a stentorian voice close to him, and Peter finds himself once more in close proximity to his persecutors of the previous night. These words act as a note of call, and Peter is at once surrounded by his opponents, among whom the landlord of the tavern is conspicuously present.

Wretched Stott! he takes to his heels to run, but all agility is gone from his tired limbs; he falls, picks himself up, falls and rises again, always with this unruly band close upon him; they have not touched him yet, but their coarse features and loud voices accompany him in whatever direction he guides his steps, and do what he may he cannot escape from them.

'Alice's father—find Alice's father,' is the demoniac refrain, and to Peter Stott's harassed mind it seems as if this tipsy tavern crew, who gibe and torture him, were his mental persecutors who have assumed bodily form. But they don't allow him time to think. To go on for ever is obviously the punishment which he has been ordained for some reason to undergo, and forwards, ever forwards, he is urged—now down in a pitfall, now up again to scramble along a difficult stony way—still it is always on, going on with that band

of miscreants behind him. Into a narrow alley do they at last hunt him, where it would seem that they *must* overpower and seize him, but still his flagging footsteps lead him to the end ; he turns the corner, and with a cry of relief falls on his own doorstep.

‘Eh, what ! God have mercy upon me !—it can’t be possible ! Alice, poor Alice ! she died fifty years ago ;’—and the brewer, awakening from his siesta, starts hurriedly to his feet.

Fifty years ago—ay, did she ; and the recollection, even when it forces itself upon his mind in his waking moments, brings more remorse than grief.

‘Conscience makes cowards of us all.’ So it would seem with Peter Stott, to judge from the convulsion of feeling which overcomes him before he returns slowly to the actual relations of his life after his experiences in that fearful dream : well could he say, with Clarence—

‘I would not spend another such a night,  
Though ’twere to buy a world of happy days,  
So full of dismal terror was the time !’

Ay, she had passed to her rest full fifty years ; a buxom wife and many olive branches have sat round his well-spread board since then, to whom the name of Alice is never uttered. But the god of dreams has brought the old slumbering past back once more vividly before his mind ; and, as Peter Stott stands in troubled agitation on his hearth-rug, he makes no answer to the conscience which has awakened within him, save to murmur feebly with his old pinched lips—

‘I have done these things,  
That now give evidence against my soul !’

### The Haunting Hand.

He deemed her false to him. His furious thought,  
    Questing for vengeance, made him overbold ;  
    And so, among the summer green and gold,  
He led her forth, in seeming undistraught,  
  
To the Black Tarn, where early love had wrought  
    Rich hours for them—their trysting place of old ;  
    And there, while in the reeds a glad wind lolled,  
And brown bees murmured, at his end he caught,  
  
Accusing her. His wrong took fire. White hell  
    Flamed round him. Pale, reproachful, mute, she knelt,  
    She clung . . . he stood alone upon the strand.  
  
Alone ! and ever in his prayerful cell  
    He heard that wind among those reeds, and felt  
    Clutch at his heart that pleading, drowning hand.



THE HAUNTING HAND.

## My Uncle Ben.

Mr Uncle Ben believe in ghosts? Of course he did; he used to say:—‘No modern mansion of stucco and plaster for me; give me a grand old house, all covered with ivy and hidden by trees, whose walls are hung with tapestry, and whose passages, extending from room to room, make the blood curdle with their gloom and length. Why, sir, there is something enlivening even in its decay; the dampness of its walls, and the cracks in the discoloured ceilings, which only suggest to the vulgar mind ague and rheumatism, are evidences to me of its venerable age and respectability. The very mice that scamper up and down in the time-worn wainscoting, give me a friendly greeting that I never meet in your new-fashioned houses, built for a race of mammon worshippers who have made their wealth out of shoddy and petroleum.

‘People mourn over the various ills that flesh is heir to, over the loss of money, lands, and health, and other insignificant things, but I mourn over the decline in the race of our ghosts—that is a real loss; but what can you expect? They are sneered at by foolish sceptics, and insulted by dictionary-concocters like Walker; what decent spectre could feel any respect for himself when people spell him *specter*? It is enough to make him contemptible in his own eyes, and cause him to let himself out to be exhibited at an entertainment combining instruction, amusement, and horrors, for the small sum of one shilling per head. What honest gentlemanly ghost, who lives in a quiet respectable country house, would have any connection with the disreputable roving spirits that can be called up by any charlatan or impostor to play on a cracked accordion, to make stupid jokes, to untie knots, and to rap out ghastly revelations from a dirty deal table? An old-fashioned, aristocratic phantom would despise the tricks of such nomadic nonentities, as he wanders through the dreary corridors of the haunted house, or remains in his garret or cellar, thinking over the good old times when he appeared with clanking chains to frighten weary wayfarers, and make the awe-struck folks shudder as they sat in the old chimney corner.

‘Think of the thrilling interest he excited when he revealed to the true heir the place where the money was concealed, that he had robbed him of before he left this life for the land of shades.

Such a ghost was well worth knowing; and so was the good old scholarly phantom, who required you to speak to him in Latin, who appeared only at the canonical hour of twelve, and who could not be got rid of with your furniture, but remained one of the fixtures of the ancient mansion.

‘To have such a ghost in your family is the only criterion of age and respectability; once a man was known to be a gentleman by the house he inhabited, by his carriage, and his coat-of-arms. Now Mr. Solomon Stubbs, the retired cheesemonger, buys the house of the ruined Marquis de Sang-Azur; and purchases a crest at the Heralds’ College; he may purchase almost anything, may keep a dozen carriages, but he cannot buy a ghost; it is only the ancient families that can keep that proof of respectability.’

I really believe that Uncle Ben valued the shade that was said to haunt his house far higher than all his more tangible property. Nothing made him more angry than for any one to doubt its existence; he was always ready to break a lance with any sceptic on the subject, and to offer him a bed in the haunted room; and, although many of the younger members of the family scoffed at the story, very few had the courage to accept the challenge.

One winter night, when the wind was moaning round the chimney pots and through the eaves, singing a dirge among the leafless branches of the gaunt old spectral trees for the joys of the dead summer, the family was gathered round the fire in the drawing-room.

Uncle Ben, who was standing with his back to the fire, said to his nephew:—

‘I think, Joe, we had better put on another log of wood; I don’t feel inclined for bed yet, and I suppose you youngsters intend to sit up half the night, as usual.’

‘I don’t mean to turn in yet, for one, uncle,’ replied Joe. ‘Tell us one of your ghost stories; a regular blood-curdler.’

‘Ah, Joe,’ said the old man, ‘I am afraid you are a thorough sceptic. You disbelieve in all supernatural appearances.’

‘Certainly,’ answered Joe, who was secretary to the Literary Debating Society in the little town of Mudborough, and who had written an essay to prove the non-existence of everything, and that we are simply the creations of our own thoughts. ‘Certainly these impalpable spectres are only optical illusions which the disordered condition of our weak physical organs brings before us.’

‘I own you are a clever lad, Joe, but I don’t care a button for your arguments. I believe in ghosts because I have seen them.’

‘Oh, I am open to conviction; if you introduce me to a

*bonâ-fide* ghost, I'll give in. I believe only in the things I understand.'

'Joe, you have as little faith as a Jew; and if you only believe in what you understand, your creed will be shorter than that of any man I know.'

'Can you give us any proof? Can you mention one instance in which the spectre has appeared to anyone you know?'

'A hundred, if you wish it,' said the old man.

'One will do; give us one genuine case and we will believe.'

'I will: listen. The story that I am about to relate is an incident that happened to myself some twenty years ago, and for the truth of which I can vouch.'

'Well, proceed.'

'I would give you the history of the spectre attached to this house, but that only appears to a favoured few, and I have not yet seen it, although I have often enough heard the noises it makes.'

'We should prefer a ghost that can be seen, if you have ever met with one.'

'You must understand that the village in which I lived, like many others, possesses its spectral visitor. About a hundred years ago, an ancestor of mine started for London in his travelling carriage, one evening about the latter end of June. He was an exceedingly irascible man, and as the coachman was not sufficiently quick in preparing the vehicle, he became much enraged, and used exceedingly passionate language. For some time the coachman bore his abuse patiently, but, at last, he also lost his temper, and struck the old gentleman in the face.

'In those days everybody wore a sword; and my ancestor, who was always too ready to draw, snatched his weapon from its sheath, and with one blow severed the unfortunate man's head from his body.

'Conscience-stricken at this fearful crime, and terrified by the dread of its consequences, he gazed upon the headless body for a few moments, and then, being seized with a fit of apoplexy, was carried into the house by his servants, where he died in a few hours.'

'Well,' said Joe, 'although the story is horrible enough, it has nothing of the supernatural in it. It is quite possible that an angry old man may commit a murder, and die of fright.'

'Yes, you are right; if the tale ended there, there would be nothing to doubt; but what I am going to tell you, I am afraid, will be scoffed at by my sceptical young friends who disbelieve everything they do not see or hear.'

'That's meant for me,' said Joe, with a laugh. 'Never mind, uncle; go on with your story.'

'Yes, my boy, now I come to the marvellous part. Every year, as the hands of the clock point to the hour of midnight, a travelling carriage, with four horses, driven by a headless coachman, leaves that village, and passes down the London Road.'

'He must be clever if he can see to drive without his head,' interrupted the still sceptical Joe.

'That I cannot explain; some ghost-seers say that it is possible for people in a clairvoyant state to read from the pit of the stomach; at all events, a dead man may be possessed of faculties that we do not understand; for a man becomes considerably altered when he is dead.'

'He does, I admit.'

'And if you allow that a dead man can drive at all, the small matter of a head more or less is of very little importance.'

'Just so.'

'You know that when a man dies, he becomes a spirit.'

'That's rum,' said Joe.

'No, sir, it's not rum, nor whisky either; and if you cannot listen to my story without endeavouring to turn it into ridicule, I had better leave off,' replied Uncle Ben, who was as peppery as his ancestor.

'Oh! pray go on, uncle,' exclaimed all the listeners. 'We'll try to keep Joe in order.'

'Well, as I was saying, this apparition made its appearance once a year, as the clock was striking twelve. Many of the villagers had heard the tramp of horses, and the rattling of wheels, as the ghostly *cortège* passed by. Now and then some favoured individual witnessed the headless driver, as he whipped his horses on towards London. But, in all cases, the coach passed too quickly for anyone to see whether the old gentleman was really inside or not.'

'And did no one ever see him?' asked one of the party.

'You shall hear. I will confess that, until the night when the incident which I am about to relate took place, I was as great an unbeliever as any of you, and always treated the whole account as an old woman's tale, only fit to frighten children. But, one evening, as I sat smoking with some old friends, one of them, a devout believer in everything supernatural, began to talk about the family legend. I, as usual, threw ridicule upon the affair. Perhaps the good wine had inspired me with more than ordinary courage, perhaps not; at all events, I horrified some of the company by stating my intention of venturing out to wander down the road, and see if I could meet the phantom cavalcade. I swore that if I did, I would ask the old gentleman to give me a lift, and

offered to bet a hundred pounds that the whole legend was a pack of lies.'

'And did you go?'

'Yes; although some of the more superstitious of the party tried to prevent me, I persevered, and wandered out into the night ready to meet with ghost or goblin.'

'And did you meet them?'

'Just as I emerged from the lane, the village clock chimed the three quarters, and I sat down upon a moss-covered milestone to wait and watch for the phantoms that "come like shadows—so depart." The night was chilly, and, as I wrapped my cloak around me, I began to shudder, as I wondered if, by any possibility, there could have been any truth in the strange story that I had heard. I had brought with me a pocket-flask, so I treated myself to a nip to warm me, as I gradually felt, like the man in the play, that all my courage was oozing out at my fingers' ends.'

'Oh, uncle, afraid!' cried one of the boys.

'Yes, my boy, I must confess it, for the moment I began to wish I was back in the comfortable old dining-room; but as the brandy warmed me up I laughed at my fears, and determined to stay it out, careless of man or devil.

'Suddenly the clock struck the hour of midnight.

'As the last echoes died away, I heard, in the distance, a sound like the noise of a carriage and horses rapidly approaching. My blood began to curdle in my veins; it came nearer and nearer; and, at last, I saw a curious old-fashioned vehicle coming towards me at a furious pace.

'For a moment I was speechless, but mustering all my courage, I cried out to the coachman to stop. He did so, and then, to my intense surprise, I saw that his head had been severed from the trunk. The ghastly head lay by his side on the coachbox, which perhaps accounted for his being able to hear my cries.

'As the carriage stopped, he sprang to the ground, flung open the door, let down the steps, and signed for me to enter. By this time my nerves were well braced up, and I jumped in without any fear.

'Upon entering the coach and taking my seat, I found myself opposite an old gentleman who was dressed in the costume of the commencement of the reign of George III. Upon his head was an old-fashioned tie-wig, and in his hand was a naked sword which was still covered with blood. His face was of an unearthly pallor, and had upon it a soured, scared look, which did not make him a very pleasant-looking travelling companion.

'For some time we sat face to face; and when I found that

he did not appear to take the slightest notice of me, I began to be more at my ease. At last I thought that it would be very uncivil to ride in the old gentleman's coach without speaking to him, and I also felt inclined, as I had never before met with a real ghost, to make his acquaintance. So I, by way of opening the conversation, said,

“A splendid night, sir.”

‘The elderly party in the tie-wig made no reply.

“In a hurry to get to town, I presume? I am very much obliged to you for the lift.”

‘Still no answer. After this we both sat for some time in silence; the ghost seemed buried in thought, and I remained watching him with great interest. At last, the night being chilly for the time of year, and the coach having about it a peculiar atmosphere like that of a vault, I began to feel extremely cold, and I drew out once more my flask of brandy.

‘The eyes of the old fellow lit up and twinkled with excitement, as he saw me drink. I offered him the bottle; he accepted it with a low bow, and followed my example.

“Thank you,” said he; “I have not tasted such good brandy for many a day.” He then drew out his snuff-box and offered me a pinch. Not daring to offend him, I took one, but I carefully let it drop on the floor of the carriage when his eyes were turned away.

‘After a second nip the old gentleman grew quite sociable, and began to talk; he complimented me upon my bravery in daring to stop his carriage. For just one century, he had, once a year, driven along this road without meeting anyone who had the courage to ride with him; and, through me, he would be released from all further punishment, which was to last until some brave fellow accompanied him in his drive, and conversed with him.

‘For this release he heartily thanked me, and said that, for my courage, I should be lucky in all my business speculations: and, as you are aware, he turned out a true prophet.’

‘Did you talk about anything else?’ asked Joe.

‘Oh, yes. My old friend had as much curiosity as a woman,’ said Uncle Ben, who, I need not say, was an inveterate bachelor. ‘We had a conversation about London. It appears that he was a great beau in his time, and he considered himself an enormous favourite with the ladies. He wished to know who was the reigning toast, and was much disgusted when I told him that toasts had gone out of fashion.’

‘Was that all?’

‘Oh, no. He told me where the best civet and pomatum was

to be bought, and who was the best peruke-maker : and was still more surprised when I said that no one wore wigs now, except lawyers and coachmen. He asked if travelling was as dangerous as ever ; though he confessed that he had not been troubled much lately by the knights of the road. He said that one rode up to stop him twenty-five years before, but the sight of his headless driver had so frightened him, that he put spurs to his horse, and disappeared as if he had had twenty Bow-Street runners at his heels.'

'Did you not ask what became of him on the other nights of the year, when he was not out for his drive?'

'He said that, in company with the innumerable shades who were condemned to occasionally revisit the earth for crimes committed during their past lives, he passed his time hovering round his old haunts, longing to become visible to his descendants, and to assist them in times of trouble, but unable to do so. As we conversed, the time rapidly slipped away ; and at length the lamps of London became visible in the distance. After thanking the old man for his courtesy, I suggested that I might now alight, as I had a great many friends in town that I should like to visit ; but he shook his head.

"No, no," said he, "we are at the mercy of my coachman ; he has the entire command during our drive, and he will only stop at the place where we picked you up. See, he is turning the horses round ; we are about to return."

'If the journey to town seemed short, the journey back was still shorter. The old man told me a hundred anecdotes of the people of his time. He had been a staunch Jacobite, and he told me all about the young Cavalier, and painted the March to Finchley in words that did full justice to Hogarth's picture. The statesmen, wits, and soldiers of the last century appeared to stand before me in the flesh, and I never enjoyed a drive better than the one I had with my ghostly ancestor.

'As the clock struck one, we pulled up at the old moss-covered milestone where I first stopped the coach. Once more thanking me for the inestimable favour I had done him, the old gentleman signed to the driver to open the carriage door. I got out, and, as I turned round to bid him good-bye, I found that the whole cavalcade—coach, horses, driver, and old gentleman—had vanished into thin air, and I was alone.'

'Alone?' exclaimed his hearers.

'Yes,' said Uncle Ben ; 'but the strange thing was that I became insensible, and knew nothing more until I was found the next morning lying beside the milestone with the empty brandy-flask in my hand.'

‘I thought so. You emptied the bottle, fell asleep, and dreamed that you saw the phantom *cortège*,’ said Joe.

‘No, sir, it was no dream. When I saw that carriage, and when I rode in it, I was as much awake as I am now; and when you are as old as I am, and have seen as many wonders, you will be surprised at nothing, and will own that there are more things in heaven and earth than are dreamed of in your philosophy.’

### The Danger Signal.

THE guard is out along the down,  
The cutter holds the sea;  
Unless a signal can be shown,  
The lugger which the smugglers own  
May sail no longer free.

The wild wind, blowing fresh and cold,  
Threw surf upon the shore;  
While, creeping from a secret hold,  
An old man launches, stern and bold,  
His boat, with trouble sore.

Skirting the cliffs, the dusky sail  
Escapes the coast-guard’s sight;  
Until a flash, a lusty hail,  
Tells them their well-laid trap must fail,—  
No spoil for them that night.

*The fatal Curiosity; or, A Hundred Years Hence.*

BY JAMES PAYN.

## CHAPTER I.

## AT THE BREAKFAST-TABLE.

It was Christmas morning 1977, and nearly ten o'clock, yet none of the guests who at that season are always to be found at Mel-lington Hall had yet made their appearance at the breakfast-table. People got up when they liked in that excellent mansion, and were never punished with cold tea. The hostess, Mrs. Raymond, was hospitality itself, and her husband would have been equally so if he had had time. He was, however, entirely occupied in scientific pursuits, from which he could barely tear himself away, even to eat his meals; it was quite a treat, said his wife, to see him take a holiday on this occasion, which, as the old saying observes, 'Comes but once a year.' She had a passion for old sayings, old observances, old fashions, and on Christmas Day she would have everything arranged as much as possible in accordance with ancient custom. There was nothing newfangled to be seen in the appointments of the table that morning, while, on the other hand, some things were so old that they had quite the flavour of rarities. For example, dried leaves of tea were put in the teapot and boiling water poured over them, after which the tea-maker (fancy a tea-maker!) dispensed it with her own hands; toast (also hand-made) appeared in quaint little silver racks; loaves of bread, such as one now only sees in pictures, baked from the flour in an oven; butter quite independent of it, and in pats, as it used to be before cow-corn was invented and the great principle of combination of cultivation discovered; marmalade produced by slicing oranges, and subjecting them to some tedious mechanical process; eggs laid by live hens, *one at a time*; and salmon cutlets dissociated from the fish, and brought by land (such was the lady's caprice) from the nearest seaport, a hundred miles away. On the side-table, in addition to cold kangaroo and the usual meats, there was a small plate of the almost extinct crustacean called oysters. These last, however, were only partaken of as a relish, since they cost their weight in ideas. Many persons, indeed, objected to them on principle; it was 'taking too much thought,' they said; and certainly they were an extravagant luxury even at the table of such a

man as Mr. Raymond, who was said to have thirty thousand a year; for no man's ideas can last for ever.

Mrs. Raymond has been much exercised in her mind with the teapot, which is evidently a strange vessel to her; but at last she has made the tea in the old-fashioned way, and stands regarding it with a pleased smile on her kind, comely face.

'I do believe I have done it right,' says she; 'at least, as old Anthony Trollope describes the process in one of his domestic novels. If it were not for such books as his, we should never know how people really lived and talked a hundred years ago. Whatever Harry may say, we are certainly under great obligations to our far-away ancestors, at all events to those who were authors; the best punch we make is still from that receipt given by Dickens in his *Pick* pick—what is it? I never can remember those queer names his stories go by—and beats, in my opinion, the produce of our best punch vineyards. Good morning, Sir Rupert. Nay, you are not late, I assure you; and if you were, I should set it down to the temperature of your room. Harry, you know, is mad about ventilation.'

'Well, I must say, my dear madam, if we were living in the old fireside days, one would feel a little cold under his *régime*. Why, good heavens, you've got a fire!'

'Yes; we always have on Christmas Day, or rather I always have, for my husband calls it "relapsing into barbarism." To my mind that crackle of sticks is very cheerful; it reminds one of the good old times when people burnt heretics and martyrs, and persons in effigy, when they couldn't get the real ones (that *was* funny, wasn't it?), and all because of their *opinions*. What drollery our ancestors must have possessed.'

'That's true; but I doubt whether the people of whom the bonfires were composed appreciated the joke.'

'But they had only got to asbest—oh, I forgot, that wasn't invented, was it? Why, how on earth did they put out fires—I mean conflagrations?'

'My dear madam, they poured water upon them. I don't mean to say that they had not some ingenious methods of doing that, engines, hydrants, and other mechanical contrivances; but that is what it came to, when all was done they poured water upon them.'

What a cheery ringing laugh that dear Mrs. Raymond had; she had not a delicate sense of humour, but broad and palpable absurdities, like that of burning people for their opinions, and of creating scalding steam when the object was to extinguish and cool a thing, tickled her immensely. She fell back in her chair

and fairly wobbled with laughter; her plump figure seemed to become one dimple, and to typify wholesome Mirth itself.

Sir Rupert placed his double eyeglass upon his nose, and then withdrew them with nervous haste and substituted another pair. 'Goodness gracious,' muttered he, 'what a mistake! I was almost looking at her through my Pandioptic spectacles.' These were not those in ordinary use, which command but a mile or so when high on the nose, and the twenty-thousandth part of an inch when depressed, but a kind only used by scientific persons for looking into milestones and other geological experiments; and with them you could see through everything. He was a fine tall old gentleman, but with rather a finical manner and a face beautifully carved with the small-pox (in the Middle Ages he would have been hideously pitted by it, and even under the old system of vaccination, not improved, but as it was he was splendid). He had earned his title by the possession of one peculiar idea, which was that everything was really contrary to what it appeared to be. Centuries ago there had been one Berkeley who published an opinion that nothing had any real existence (he had been made a bishop for it even in those days), and Sir Rupert's notion had been objected to as being a plagiarism from that ecclesiastic; but the Court of Patents of Nobility had decided in his favour. 'It *was* a new idea,' they said, 'to suppose that everything was really the contrary of what it appeared to be.'

'Now, my dear madam,' said he, gazing earnestly at his laughing hostess, 'are you really enjoying yourself when you laugh like that, or are you in torments! I see you put your hand to your side.'

'That is because it aches,' explained the lady, still undulating with merriment.

'Just so; it aches,' said Sir Rupert triumphantly; 'that is only another proof (if one were wanting) of my universal theory. My idea is this—'

Another moment, and Sir Rupert would have mounted his hobby and rendered his poor hostess very melancholy indeed, but at that crisis her liege lord, who would endure, as Sir Rupert was well aware, no theories but his own, opportunely entered the breakfast-room and preserved her.

'Why, Raymond, this is quite late for you,' exclaimed the visitor, as he saluted his host.

'Late! Gad, *you'd* have been late if you had had St. Gothard air turned on into your room in place of the Simplon; upon my life, as I tell Charlotte there, there's not a servant in the whole house that can be trusted with the taps.'

Mr. Raymond was a stout-looking man enough, stouter even than

his wife, but this was caused in his case less by habit of body than by want of exercise; he was always dabbling in science, and could never be got out even in a sky-chaise for half an hour's exercise. From his build one would have expected him to have been of a florid complexion, and to be indolent and sleepy; whereas he was fidgety, impatient, and energetic to an excessive degree. Sir Rupert liked him, if he liked him at all, because he illustrated his theory.

'But, my dear Harry,' remonstrated Mrs. Raymond, 'there is really no occasion to put yourself in such a tantrum; of course it was a foolish mistake of Duncombe's, but it might have been much more serious.'

'Serious, madam? Do you call a difference of 900 feet perpendicular nothing serious? My doctor has particularly enjoined upon me never to sleep in a mountain atmosphere of less than 10,000 feet. What's the good of having mountain atmospheres laid on in your house at all, if things are arranged like this? Why, even in those meagre old times that you are always praising so, when people had gas in their bedrooms, the servants knew when it was turned on or off.'

'But *something* was turned on, my dear, in your case, though it was not the right thing,' remonstrated the lady of the house. 'Moreover, gas or not, our ancestors did contrive to live: you talk about not being able to breathe unless this or that air is laid on fresh from Switzerland or the seaside, but what would you have done had you been compelled to put up with bottled air from those places, such as your fathers used, or even with any air there might be about—Pimlico air, Holloway air, or such as you would get here in the country, and with which the agricultural poor have still to be content?'

'That's no argument, madam. You might as well ask me how I should have got about before sky-chaises were invented, or warmed myself—why, bless my soul, if you are not burning *coal*!'

'Now do sit down, Harry, and take your breakfast comfortably, like Sir Rupert and myself; not walk about the room picking holes in everything in that aggravating manner. You know it is my whim to have everything on Christmas Day as old fashioned as possible.'

'But why *coals*, madam?' reiterated Mr. Raymond petulantly; he had fallen on his knees upon the hearthrug, the better to examine this curious spectacle of a material fire. 'Why *coals*? Are you aware what is the price of coals per ounce avoirdupois?'

'I have no idea,' confessed Mrs. Raymond.

'Of course not; you need not tell me that I didn't marry an heiress; and let me remark, that even I have not ideas enough to pay

for such freaks as these. Coals, indeed! Why, every one of those little black diamonds will cost me as much as a white diamond of the same size. Puff—how the smoke comes in one's eyes. This is a return to the first ages of savagery. There is nothing to excuse it, or recommend it, except that it's expensive. You have no better reason for it than had Cleopatra for swallowing the pearl—and what was a pearl in those days compared with a scuttle of coals in these? No wealth can stand it, and if I had five million ideas a year, I would not permit such extravagance.'

'My dear Harry, I am so sorry,' said good Mrs. Raymond, rising from her chair to kiss the bald spot on her husband's head as he knelt before the object of his ire; 'we will never have coals again, even on Christmas Day, though that never comes but once a year, you know.'

'I don't know anything of the kind, madam,' returned her still irritated lord; 'I am not without some expectation of being able to bring about anniversaries more than once a year, and even at pleasure. However, the subject is too intricate to discuss now—there, there, we'll say no more about it, Dodo' (he always called his wife 'Dodo' when he was in a good humour, and especially when he wished a quarrel to become extinct). 'Let me cut you some kangaroo—Why, by Jove, what are these? Oysters! What do you think of oysters, Sir Rupert? This is domestic economy with a vengeance, upon my word!'

'Well, I was thinking whether I had ever *seen* an oyster,' replied Sir Rupert, who took everything very literally except what could be referred to his pet theory, which oysters couldn't, since nobody has ever yet imagined the contrary of an oyster. 'Having been always a man of one idea, you see, I have not been able to indulge in luxuries—thank you, since they *are* here I will have one; it is the inside that you eat, is it not? Swallow it whole? Surely not. Very good, I put myself in your hands. One, two—there, I have done it.'

'For such a luxury you don't look as if you enjoyed it much,' said Mr. Raymond dryly.

'Ah, but I did though,' answered the other; 'that's just my theory—you should never judge by appearances. I must say it strikes me now, however, as not being quite so nice; I have a taste in my mouth as if it were full of halfpence, but *it isn't* full of halfpence, so there's my theory again, you see. Where do these oysters come from now?'

'The sea; they are natives of it,' exclaimed the host. 'My wife had them sent from Whitstable *by land*.'

'Curious,' observed Sir Rupert, 'and I should think expensive.'

'You'd have to think a good deal, I promise you, before you paid for them, my good fellow,' continued Mr. Raymond; 'a man need be made of thoughts with a wife like mine——Well, Charley, how have *you* slept? Nothing wrong with *your* air-laps, I should say, to look at you.'

Charles Lester was the nephew of Mrs. Raymond, but as much the favourite of her husband as herself; a fine handsome young fellow, with a roguish smile, and that confident and easy air which, when not the result of self-complacency, is so winning and agreeable.

'The air was delicious,' answered the young fellow, as he kissed his aunt; 'and my dreams were so divine that I think it must have been laid on from the Jungfrau. Why, surely' (sniffing) 'this is Brighton, is it not? How invigorating, how appetising!'

'No, darling, it's Isle of Wight air. We have got Brighton in the dining-room, but your uncle complains that there is not enough smell of the sea with it. He will never be satisfied, I know, till we have a different air in every room.'

'And so I would have, if I were rich enough,' said Mr. Raymond stoutly. 'I envy old Lord Raby, who has put his castle in connection with the Himalayas. I enjoy those sniffs at Dhawalagiri in the library; 28,000 feet, my lad, not an inch less!'

'What a long library,' observed Charles, who was by this time busy with the cold kangaroo.

'Nonsense, I mean the mountains; what a fool you are, boy!'

'I know it; it's almost the only thing I do know,' replied the young man, laughing. 'Fortunately I have a clever uncle, who keeps me now, and intends to provide for me hereafter.'

'Ah! you think so; then he *won't*,' cried Sir Rupert, looking sharply up.

'He must,' answered Mrs. Raymond softly. 'If poor Charley was left to live by his wits, he would starve.'

'Quite right, aunt; it would not, however, be a lingering death,' said Charley coolly; 'all would soon be over.'

'Don't my darling, don't; the idea is too much for me.'

'Of course it is,' said Mr. Raymond, with irritation; 'did you ever know an idea that wasn't? Why on earth should you go trying your constitution in that way; have you not got a husband to think for you? Why, Lotty, how late you are!'

Lotty was Miss Charlotte Greville, an orphan daughter of an old friend of Mr. Raymond, and one who would have found a home under his roof if she had not had an idea in the world. She had, however, a large income of them in her own right, and was not only a 'catch' on that account, but one of the most charmingly

beautiful young women you ever beheld. Such an heiress as this you might have expected would have looked out for a mate in possession of at least an equal fortune, yet she showed considerable favour to Charley (who had not a notion to bless himself with), and had for certain refused much more eligible offers. Among the suitors had been Sir Rupert himself; but he did not entertain the least bad feeling on that account, because her rejection had confirmed his theory: 'I thought you would have had me, you see, and you didn't, which is another proof (if one were wanting),' &c. &c.

She kissed Mr. and Mrs. Raymond, but, with true maidenly reserve, contented herself with looking at Charley as if she wanted to kiss him.

'Has the post come in?' inquired she of that young man.

Charley rose and went to the window. 'The London post is signalled, but there are no letters of consequence for any of us,' replied he. 'The Australian bag has just dropped in the garden, for I heard it flop.'

'Then let it lie where it is,' said Mr. Raymond. 'I never had a letter from an Australian mail (or female for that matter either) that did not contain a request for assistance from their old-world relatives.'

'What a trouble we have had to get that Australian delivery twice a day,' observed Mrs. Raymond, taking no notice of this remark; 'one would really think the theory of attraction had never been discovered. Is there any news in the morning papers?'

'Nothing of much importance,' answered Charley, still at the window; 'the Tichborne case is still agitating the public mind.'

'I wonder how that case began,' observed Mrs. Raymond, leaning back in her chair; 'I can never make head nor tail of it.'

'Well, it's a long story, aunt,' said Charley. 'There was a Sir Roger Tichborne who fell out of the Ark, and whether he was drowned, or floated on account of his fat, is the point at issue. For my part, I don't believe the fellow was ever in the Ark at all.'

'Your opinion is worth nothing,' said Sir Rupert rudely; 'according to *my* theory, he certainly was.'

'Quiet, quiet!' exclaimed Mr. Raymond, 'I will have no quarrels here over the Tichborne case. It is one of the many legacies of evil that we have received from our ancestors, a miasma from the mists of antiquity. Remember, it is Christmas Day, when even the Claimant should cease to be a bone of contention.'

'He did not look much like a bone of anything,' said Charley contemptuously.

'No, but he *is*,' put in Sir Rupert, 'and that's only another proof (if proof were wanting) —'

'Silence!' roared Mr. Raymond. 'I won't have it. Who's going to church? Tell us how's the weather, Charley; my eyes are not so good as they used to be.'

Charley, who had resumed his place at the table, here looked up at the ceiling and read off the gauge, 'Very high and dangerous, Channel tunnel endangered.'

'Why, you stupid boy, that's the "sea disturbance."'

'I don't wonder at his being puzzled!' exclaimed Mrs. Raymond, striking in to Charley's rescue; 'what with the wind, and the sea, and the daily state of the public health, I can never tell, myself, whether the morning is wet or fine. Upon my word, I believe the good old plan of looking out of the window is as good as any.'

'According to that evidence, it seems beautifully fine,' remarked Sir Rupert.

'Are you sure that the antiphinium isn't stretched over the lawn?' observed Miss Greville.

'By Jove, you are right,' returned the baronet, 'which proves my theory, by-the-by.'

'Did you think I was wrong then?' inquired the young lady tartly (she was angry because he had snubbed her young man).

'No, no,' answered the knight hastily, 'I only referred to its looking beautifully fine whenever it is raining cats and dogs. The gold-beaters' skin stretched over the lawn is so delicate that I did not at first perceive that it had been put up. I thought it was not, you know, which proves (if proof were wanting)—'

'The skin ought to be all over the country in a day like this,' interrupted Mr. Raymond petulantly. 'The roads at least might be protected, so that people might go to church. And yet the Government calls itself paternal.'

'Religion, however, is an open question,' remarked Sir Rupert.

'But it needn't be open to the *rain*,' retorted the host. He was not so logical as usual, but then he was a little put out. 'However, it is fortunate that we have every convenience for attending public worship, without getting wet through. Let's see, you're a Sandemanian, Sir Rupert, ain't you? I believe I've got a Sandemanian tube in the attic somewhere, though I don't believe it has ever been used. Duncombe shall bring it down presently. My wife and I generally take our doctrine on wet days from St. Paul's or Westminster Abbey; she is so fond of the organ. Lotty, my darling, you are ritualistic, I think; you'll find the service is nicely done at St. Ethelberga's; we've got a tube, the mouthpiece hangs at the east end of the chapel, shaped like a gargoyle. Charley, my boy, what are your tenets?'

‘Oh, don’t mind me, uncle; Lotty’s mouthpiece will suit me very well,’ answered the young man demurely.

Whereupon they went into prayers.

## CHAPTER II.

### IN CHAPEL.

THE spectacle of public worship in a cathedral or other imposing edifice is, without doubt, both impressive and elevating, but the sight of a quiet party at family prayers is also not without its peculiar charm.

Mr. Raymond was liberality itself in matters of conscience, and, though a good orthodox churchman, spared no expense in providing for his guests every description of religious discourse. It was even rumoured that he had had a tube laid on at an enormous expense from the chapel of Johanna Southcote’s great-granddaughter, who still carried on the business of her distinguished ancestress, and preached to a select circle in the groves of Paradise Park, once Seven Dials, and the identical spot affected by the original Johanna. This was perhaps an exaggeration, but the very assertion illustrated his catholicism of mind. The chapel at Mellington Hall was quite a gem in its way. An immense divan ran round the apartment, broken at intervals with *prie-dieu* for those who preferred them; while on the table in the centre, hung with purple, and edged with gold, were arranged, in chaste silver vases, the ashes of the deceased Raymonds; in these the present representative of that ancient race took a pardonable pride.

‘To think,’ said he, taking one of them up reverently, and removing the lid, ‘that at one time people calling themselves civilised used to put their deceased relatives underground—dibble them in like potatoes—and even that it was not so long ago when they employed petrification.’

‘Very true,’ said Sir Rupert, ‘I remember it well; and wonderfully well preserved some of them looked.’

‘Yes, indeed,’ replied Mr. Raymond, sighing at some reminiscence that this idea suggested, and thereby inadvertently blowing the remains of his great-grandfather all over the room, ‘those were very hard times for our dear departed. Our funeral pyres, again, were only rehabilitations of an old idea; the covered furnaces were cumbersome, seldom elegant, and, what was worse, the most delicious odours—rose-leaf, sandal-wood, and russia leather—were thereby always associated with human loss. *Ars longa, vita brevis*; what a time it was before we thought of the *reductio ad absurdum* plan, reducing them by the touch of a wire to a handful of dust. Lord

Raby deserves his peerage for that, though he never should have another idea in his life.'

'Ay, but that must come to an end, you know, some day, Raymond. The sun is getting exhausted; these unexpected demands upon his system are beginning to tell upon him.'

'You may say that, Sir Rupert,' answered Mr. Raymond mournfully. He is already "paling his ineffectual fires"—curious what prophets some of those old writers were! "Saw the nations' airy navies grappling in the central blue," says one of them—Archbishop Tenison I believe it was; strange, by-the-by, that he and Berkeley should have been both bishops; "gift of prophecy" it seems, don't it?'

'But the nations' airy navies *don't* grapple that I am aware of,' observed Miss Greville.

'Just my theory—at least I think so,' added Sir Rupert in a hesitating tone.

'No, my darling, but they *did*,' said Mr. Raymond, laying his hand affectionately on the young girl's head. 'You were not born or thought of—certainly not born—in those days; but *I* can recollect when the German fleet anchored in a fog immediately over London, and the Admiral's ship grappled St. Paul's, and when the weather cleared was captured in consequence. Why, a hundred years ago navies used to fight at sea, and what is more, at the top of the water.'

'That is so,' corroborated Sir Rupert, seeing the two young people look incredulous; 'but speaking of prophets, I remember an old tract of that date, called the "Cruise of the Anti-Torpedo," in which the under-water inventions were anticipated.'

'I know it well,' said Mr. Raymond gravely, 'it was a remarkable advance upon the knowledge of that time, but, like most other pioneers of science, the author is nameless. But we were talking of the failing powers of the sun. Is it not terrible to think that yonder beautiful invention must some day, and we know not how soon, be rendered useless through lack of material?'

He pointed to the fireplace, a disc of splendour, produced as usual by the combination of rays from the sun, and with a reversible side to receive moonshine after dark.

'However, between ourselves, my friend'—here his voice grew very grave and impressive,—'I am not without hope that a substitute for even the sun itself may be discovered; that at all events, for all domestic purposes of light and warmth, we may be made quite independent of that waning luminary.'

'Why, you don't mean to say that you've got anything in your mind—'

'Well, it's not in *your* mind,' answered Mr. Raymond with sudden asperity; 'you've got your title, and I've got to get mine, my good friend. All I say is, that it is possible that some extraordinarily intelligent person may work out some plan to emancipate us from our dependence upon the sun, just as, when the coal deposits gave out, the universal refractor saved us from being frozen; only we must be quick about it, and not, as in that case, be reduced to our last ray before the substitute is discovered. I can well remember my poor grandmother burning her pianoforte when our woodstack came to an end in February, and the little joke I made about setting Burns to music, which made her cut me out of her will. My grandfather dared not walk out in the fields that spring—which was unusually inclement—because the peasantry had become desperate, and he had a wooden leg.'

'Those were evil days indeed,' said Sir Rupert. 'The government, however, I am glad to see, are taking time by the forelock as respects our present emergency. The application of every ray of sun to useful purposes is strenuously insisted upon, and in last night's 'Gazette' I noticed that to use a burning-glass had been declared felony; moreover, any person found with the sun in his eyes is to be prosecuted by the state.'

'All these things are only stopgaps,' observed Mr. Raymond: 'and the man who shall find a substitute for Phœbus Apollo—as my great grandfather yonder was taught to call him, before the bubble of classical education burst, and opened the first gate to the enfranchisement of our youth—will deserve well of his country. My dear Dodo, I think service must be beginning.'

He took up one of the many tubes that hung from the ceiling, and each of whose silver mouthpieces—or rather ear-pieces ('Dionysians,' as they were called after their original inventor)—was engraved with the name of the ecclesiastical edifice with which it communicated, and listened for a few seconds.

'Yes, I hear the opening notes of the organ. Sir Rupert, I see Duncombe has remembered your peculiar tap. Lotty, there is St. Ethelberga's for you and Charley.'

Everybody put on their gloves at once, and took their seats on the divan, and each, with his favourite preacher turned on at his ear, assumed, and perhaps with truth, an attitude of attention. Sir Rupert alone used the nicotina; that agreeable invention which envelops the smoker in a separate atmosphere, and permits the enjoyment of the thought-inspiring weed without annoyance to his neighbours.

'How dreadful it must have been,' observed he, 'to live in

those straitlaced times, when it was thought wicked to smoke in church.'

'Our service has *begun*, Sir Rupert,' observed Mrs. Raymond reprovingly.

'Ten thousand pardons, madam. I thought it hadn't, which is another proof (if proof were wanting),' &c. &c.

'Hush-sh-sh,' murmured the congregation.

Not a word was uttered for nearly an hour, except that Lotty whispered once 'How beautiful!' at some exquisite passage in the parish curate's sermon, and Charley replied, with his eyes fixed softly on her face, 'It is indeed!' Nothing was heard in that still chamber save the occasional spurt of Sir Rupert's cigar-lights (which lit only on the back of his head), yet everyone was imbibing the best of doctrine, or being elevated by the sublimest music.

At last Mrs. Raymond drew off her gloves in sign that she had come out of church, and in a few minutes the others did the like.

'I hope your preacher was to your liking, Sir Rupert?' observed she graciously.

'Excellent, excellent,' said he; 'not a word that I could have wished unsaid from beginning to end.'

'The compliment would have been higher, Sir Rupert, if you had heard him say anything,' observed Charley, laughing; 'but unfortunately you omitted to take the stopper out of your tube.'

'Dear me, dear me; so I did. I am sure I thought I took it out, which is only another proof (if proof were wanting)'—

But the congregation would not listen to him, they were angry, as people always are, and always will be, because they had been to church and he had not.

'You ought to be ashamed of yourself,' said the hostess; 'that comes of your horrid smoking' (against which practice, like most of her sex, though they can no longer pretend as of old that the smell annoys them, she was always inveighing). 'The use of that stopper, as you are well aware, is to cut off the communication with the pulpit when anything is said that has a bearing on one's own case likely to render one uncomfortable; it was never intended to render all preaching futile. One would almost think that you wished to silence the voice of conscience itself.'

Here Mr. Raymond hastily took out his notebook. 'Why, my excellent Dodo, you have given me an idea,' cried he; 'when I can spare a minute from my great scheme for producing light and heat, I'll just think that over. If the tube can be discovered—suppose it's the ordinary bronchial tube, for instance (though, since it is "still small," the Channel is probably of less dimensions)—

through which the voice of conscience speaks, I may make a revolution in morals. No more scruples, no more stings of remorse, no more sleepless nights; it will be better than the *Revalenta Arabica*—a revelation from Arabia Felix. What an advertisement to stick on the moon at harvest time! However, as matters are, you're all wrong, Sir Rupert, and my wife is quite right. If it was 1877, and you were obliged to go to chapel in person, anything would be excusable. It must have been most painful, for instance, in some cases to have to "sit under a clergyman."

'I believe that was a mere metaphorical expression,' said Sir Rupert, preferring even an argument with his host than to suffer the well-deserved rebukes of his hostess; 'it was a part of the Eastern imagery of our ancestors.'

'Eastern fiddlesticks,' rejoined Mr. Raymond tartly; 'I hate that system of affixing a non-natural sense of every old phrase which happens to be unintelligible to us. We find the expression "sat upon him" in many of the British classics, and also that of "a flat" as applied to a human being.'

'It was nothing but a form of clerical censure,' contended Sir Rupert stoutly. 'Similarly things were "quashed," or "squashed," in the old ecclesiastical courts. They put heavy weights on silent people in order to get at their opinions; hence the term "expression."'

'That was the *peine forte et dure*, my good fellow. You are talking about what you don't understand.'

'Then I am more likely to be right,' answered Sir Rupert quickly; 'that is the very gist of my theory. You don't mean to assert, for instance, that the phrase, "I sent George out for a fly because it was wet" (which I found in an old domestic novel of Miss Yonge's yesterday), really meant that he was sent out in an air-chaise, for they were not invented at the time of the story? I firmly believe that it was only Eastern imagery!'

'Then you will believe anything. I don't say there were air-chaises, but there was evidently some sort of wind conveyance (we know there were wind instruments), and George is recommended to go out *for a fly*, because it was wet *underfoot*. The omission of the last word is obviously a clerical error.'

'Perhaps you think that, when our ancestors used the phrase, "It will be all the same a hundred years hence," that they really thought *that*?' observed Sir Rupert contemptuously.

'Most certainly I do. In 1877, for instance, exactly a century ago, our ancestors believed that science and politics had culminated, and that there was no further room for improvement. Read the literature of that day, and you will find the writers divided into

two classes, one of which maintains, in effect, that the millennium has arrived, because they have managed to stretch a telegraph wire under the Atlantic, to go some fifty or sixty miles an hour by means of some childish contrivance in the way of a locomotive, and to poke a hole through Mont Cenis. The other class was still more idiotic, for, decrying all these inventions (which, however insignificant, were still steps in the right direction—Forward), they praised the past, and regretted the Cimmerian darkness of the days (if you can call them days) when ideas themselves were proscribed, and persons who notoriously had none were authorised to think for other people. I say that neither of those two classes had the least expectation of improvements going any farther than they were then, and that one of them even regretted they had gone so far. "It will be all the same a hundred years hence," was therefore a literal expression of their self-satisfaction.'

'Perhaps you will also assert that the phrase, "May you live a thousand years," found in the "Arabian Nights" and other books of assuredly Eastern origin, was not metaphorical?'

'Certainly it was not. The "Arabian Nights" (astounding as it may appear to us who look after our children's education ourselves, and do not depute it to hirelings) was then a child's book, and the expression you speak of was in reality written as a question, though printed by mistake without the sign of interrogation. "May you live a thousand years?" asks the child of its parent or guardian, and the reply is not stated only because it is so obvious. "You may if you can, my dear, but even Methuselah only got within a year of it." No, no, Sir Rupert, you are one of those persons who delight in paradox, and endeavour from sheer contrariety of mind to persuade yourself that our ancestors were worth having; but that is the old "noble savage" theory which has been exploded generations ago: if you care to be convinced let me show you my museum this afternoon, which contains all the most remarkable specimens of our progenitors a hundred years back, with examples of their follies, crudities, shortcomings, and social obfuscation generally. In the meantime what say you to "going out for a fly, because it is wet?" And let's have no more of your Miss Yonge.'

'She was a very excellent person,' observed Lotty boldly, who thought that poor Sir Rupert had been punished quite enough, 'and wrote good books.'

'Oh! I know them; "Night Thoughts," and all that sort of thing; they were well named, for she was all in the dark, like the rest of them,' replied Mr. Raymond with irritation. 'Come Charley, signal for the wind-waggon, and let us all get a breath of fresh air.'

## CHAPTER III.

## IN THE WIND-WAGGON

THE wind-waggon at Mellington Hall was a most comfortable conveyance, and carried off the palm from all the other carriages in the county; the wheels of its air-fans were tireless (whereby a great obstacle to progression was avoided), and were rotated by the conversation of the passengers; so that they went to-day at a fine rate, in spite of the presence of Sir Rupert, who was given to argue in a vicious circle, and thereby diminished the speed. A hand dropped into the water out of a pleasure-boat going up stream retards its progress, but if *all hands* were dropped out, it would be considerably more buoyant, though its movement would be in the other direction; and similarly if everybody had argued in a vicious circle, the wind-waggon would have gone at a tremendous pace—only backwards.

The rain had ceased, and the atmosphere was beautifully clear, exhibiting the sky lines to great advantage. That to Melbourne and Sydney was crossed immediately after they left the Hall, and but for Charley's skilful steering they would have collided with one of the Australian lines which was carrying the afternoon post.

'The reticulation of the atmosphere caused by these innumerable lines is really getting very dangerous,' observed Sir Rupert, 'and reminds one of those ancient maps of Britain by Bradshaw, showing the intersection of the railways. The only place in England that did not become a junction was Portland prison, because nobody wanted to go there.'

'A good many people, however, must have wanted to come away,' observed Mr. Raymond.

'A very judicious observation,' admitted Sir Rupert; 'perhaps you will not object to my making use of the idea—which I think may be worked up into something striking—in my place in Parliament?'

Mr. Raymond made no reply; the fact was, he did not approve of his friend being in the House at all; he liked him as a man, but had an indifferent opinion of his abilities, and especially objected to his having been made a knight. No title of course, however small, was ever conferred except for eminent public services; mere ideas, though the source of enormous revenues, did not command that distinction, unless they had been the means of conferring some benefit upon the community; and though jobs were no longer possible in those enlightened times, Sir Rupert's case did somewhat savour of a job. At a time when the two great political

parties were very equally balanced in the House, the Government had proposed a tax on muffins so comprehensive that it took in the caps of the boys of the Bluecoat School and other charitable endowments, and Sir Rupert (then Mr. Trentham) had pointed out with much ingenious subtlety that muffin caps were not muffins, *although they looked like it*; another proof, if proof were wanting, of the truth of a theory to which, as that House was well aware, he stood committed. Fired with his eloquence, which, when his hobby was fairly mounted, was really of a very extraordinary character, the Opposition divided the House against the Bill, obtained a majority and threw out the Ministry, and then (amongst other things) decreed that Mr. Trentham had deserved well of his country. In most cases this would have earned a patent of nobility, but his elevation to the peerage was objected to on the ground I have mentioned, that his idea was a plagiarism from Bishop Berkeley, and on the whole he was thought fortunate by his friends to have even earned a knighthood. This, briefly, was his story, and it was not to be wondered at that the master of Mellington Hall, with his ten thousand ideas per annum—many of them, it is true, of a most ambitious and Utopian kind, but still all tending to the public utility—felt a little sore that he was but plain Mr. Raymond, while his friend had a handle to his name and a ferule after it, namely, the initials M.P. His constituency, notwithstanding the tri-weekly Parliaments, stuck to him like wax; for they had only to object to any course of political conduct to insure his obedience to their wishes. ‘It is true, I thought it right to do so and so,’ he would tell them, ‘but as you point out to me, the facts are obviously the reverse of what I had imagined them, which only proves (if proof were wanting) the truth of that theory which (thanks to you, gentlemen) I had the opportunity on a certain great occasion to set before the Parliament of this country.’

‘Talking of railways,’ observed Mr. Raymond irritably, and with such sudden vehemence that the fan-wheel next to him made sixty revolutions on the instant (a rate of no less than 3,600 per minute). ‘Talking of railways, reminds me of the Vanishing Point.’

‘Why?’ inquired Charley simply.

His uncle was not made angry by the interruption, but only sad.

‘My poor boy,’ said he, laying his hand on Lotty’s head (for hers and Charley’s were so very close together that it was all one), ‘you are certainly the most ignorant of human beings. I don’t blame you for it, for I always thought it a mistake that persons without ideas should trouble themselves to study—since the result can be at best but the acquisition of stolen goods; but if you

had read *anything* of the history of your country, you would be aware that its railways became the destruction of all who travelled by them—scattered them in such small pieces into space that the Points (where the accidents chiefly occurred) were called Vanishing Points. I was about to observe that the adaptation of the vanishing point (a term once employed by painters only) to practical purposes is perhaps the most wonderful of our discoveries in aerial progression. No other common object for all our air-lines would have possessed such material advantages; while ever visible, yet never attained, it stimulates every energy of the steersman and confers the greatest of moral benefits.’

‘In that respect,’ observed Sir Rupert, ‘it resembles the polestar, once a great object of attraction to the humble sailor—and also to magnets.’

‘True,’ said Mr. Raymond thoughtfully. ‘I imagine the poor fellow and his companions stretched on their backs upon the decks, the better to take an observation of that bright but not very particular star.’

‘What was the matter with it?’ inquired Lotty innocently, moved by this picture of the mariner of old traversing the pathless deep in a horizontal position, and literally ‘thanking his stars’ if he arrived anywhere near the port for which he was bound.

‘I didn’t mean anything to the disadvantage of the polestar in a moral sense, my dear,’ explained Mr. Raymond, ‘though I dare say it was *not* very particular as to what it beheld; out of civilised latitudes, indeed, it has been observed to wink at some very queer proceedings. I alluded to its not being very easy to be seen. They used even to employ pointers to detect its whereabouts.’

‘No, upon my word, Raymond, I believe that is a mistake of yours,’ observed Sir Rupert quickly. ‘You may always discover the position of the polestar by means of the pointers’ is I know to be found in old “Magnal, his Questions”; but it seems to me to have been certainly a metaphorical expression.’

‘Ah, more of the Eastern imagery of our ancestors, I suppose. Well, I am a plain man myself. Put “a partridge” in that sentence in the place of “the polestar,” and what becomes of your metaphor, I should like to know?’

‘It is easy to make game of anything,’ returned Sir Rupert, ‘but I believe our far-away ancestors—even those that were sailors—were not so dull as you imagine. The conditions of their life were of course very different from our own, but they made the best of them. They did not attempt what we accomplish now, because such feats would have been impossibilities; Switzerland had no sea-board, and therefore no fleet, because its air-board could not

then be used for such purposes. The merry Swiss boy was then a shepherd, and very rarely indeed a cabin boy or a middy, but it would be absurd for us to call him a landlubber on that account, as if it was his own fault. Let us be just before we are generous with such epithets.'

'I do not-despise our forefathers for their ignorance,' resumed Mr. Raymond, 'but for their hostility to those who would have led them to better things. Moreover, what they did not understand they pronounced in their self-conceit to be either useless or hurtful. Why, the obliquity of the ecliptic (of which we have taken such admirable advantage for our cross lines) was absolutely instanced by one of their infidel mathematicians as a proof of the malevolence of the scheme of creation.'

'Why, that must have been a joke, my good friend.'

'Not a bit of it: the gentleman came from Scotland. Then, again, though they were used to see things upon the Horizon, they laughed to scorn the notion of using it as a means of transit. The Equators were practically useless. The Poles were only used for experiments at the Polytechnic to amuse children at this festive season, or as a last resource by our politicians. How different was all that from our present enlightened system, wherein a use has been found for everything—even the Irish!'

'That last, however, was a very unexpected discovery,' observed Sir Rupert, 'and had been given up by the most sanguine for centuries.'

'True; yet, after all, what could be a simpler means of resolving the Irish difficulty than that each Irishman should take his own bull by the horns? We see them now what they always wanted to be (though in a less politic sense) an independent nation. And why should they not have been so a hundred years ago? To pronounce a thing impossible is a sure means of making it so; and yet that was the generation of our ancestors who resented Darwin's theory that they were descended from the ape! I think we have much more cause to resent being descended from Darwin. Why, in those days they had not even discovered the art of preserving the surplus food in one country to supply the lack of another. Waste ruled in Australia and Want in England. The art of concentration was almost unknown.'

'People are a little longwinded even now, when they get upon their favourite topics,' observed Sir Rupert slyly.

'I was referring to the concentration of *food*, sir.'

'Oh, I beg your pardon. Well, *that* has not proved an invariable success, as I understand from Mrs. Raymond,' observed the Knight still more slyly than before.

'You are referring to that ridiculous story of the sheep's lozenge, I suppose,' said Mr. Raymond, looking just a trifle sheepish himself.

'What was *that*?' inquired Lotty mischievously.

'Well, it was a little mistake of my dear husband,' answered Mrs. Raymond. 'As soon as the lozenges were advertised, he ordered a box for the use of the parish poor, and before issuing them he was so rash as to venture upon one himself. Moreover, he actually took a whole one, as though it had been a cough lozenge.'

A roar of laughter broke from the occupants of the air-waggon, causing a tremendous acceleration of speed.

'He forgot, you see, that each lozenge was the concentration of an entire sheep (with the trifling exception of the wool and teeth), and the consequence was he became so enormously strong that he was positively dangerous. Poor Lord Raby happened to call that morning, and got his arm broken through shaking hands with my husband; and the destruction that took place in our furniture was something awful: if he laid his finger on what he thought to be a flaw in an argument, it went to pieces whether it was a flaw or not; and he cast such sheep's eyes at the maids that I should have been very much annoyed if I had not known them (I mean the eyes) to have been irresponsible agents.'

'Well, well, it might have been worse,' observed Mr. Raymond complacently; 'suppose one had taken a pork lozenge, for example, and gone the whole hog. It is no discredit to a man to have been a martyr to science; and let me tell you, ours was the first village from which want was banished, never, I believe, to return among our poor. Look down yonder at that mighty ruin, made picturesque by time, and its synonym, a little money, and reflect that that was once the universal home and last retreat of our peasants, the Union Workhouse! A hundred years ago every county had half a dozen such. And now the poor man no more dreams of visiting it than a rich man thinks of visiting the play-house.'

'You are speaking of very rich men indeed, however,' observed Sir Rupert. 'For though it is within the reach of every householder of moderate means to hear a play under his own roof, just as it is to hear a sermon—'

('Or to keep the stoppers in and *not* to hear it,' muttered Mrs. Raymond.)

'Yet, I say, the spectacle is lost to those who cannot afford the wall-pictures. How much do you suppose, Master Charley, that your uncle paid for having the Drury Lane pantomime photographed on the walls of your nursery when you were a child?'

'I have not an idea,' returned Charley with his usual truthfulness; 'but my uncle never spared expense, I know, to gratify me, and least of all when ill, as I was then.'

'Pooh, pooh, it was a mere bagatelle,' said Mr. Raymond carelessly, 'though indeed that was when the art was in its infancy. I can now get instantaneous reflections on my wall, and at a very reasonable figure, of what all my friends are doing all over the world.'

'Don't you find that a little embarrassing sometimes?' inquired Sir Rupert.

'Not a bit. I don't say that my friends do not, but that is their look-out. They ought never to do anything that they would be ashamed of my seeing upon my walls.'

Sir Rupert shook his head.

'I remember,' said Mrs. Raymond, 'the invention was very much objected to by our Australian cousins, upon the ground that they were represented upside down.'

'In my opinion that was false delicacy,' said Mr. Raymond; 'if people choose to live at the antipodes, they must take the consequences. However, that trifling cause of annoyance is now removed by the *reversor*, which makes them look all right again.'

'Even that would be unnecessary if my theory were universally adopted,' observed Sir Rupert. 'My mind always corrects my eye, and when a person looks upside down I know that he is quite the reverse and behold him accordingly.'

'Why, good gracious! then to you, Sir Rupert, we always appear to be standing on our heads!' exclaimed Mrs. Raymond in horrified accents.

'That is very true, madam; but then I know that you are incapable of such an action, and after a very little reflection reason asserts itself, and you come round again.'

I don't think Mrs. Raymond was quite satisfied with this explanation, although her husband assured her it was an argument well known to metaphysicians under the name of the Circuitous Process, and quite as good as any she was likely to get. In a few moments she observed that she was hungry and chilly, and wished to return home.

'What do you say to putting the screw on, and passing half-an-hour in the Tropics, my dear?' inquired her husband tenderly; 'we can pick a pine-apple off the first tree.'

'No, Harry; you know I dislike the sensation of being screwed exceedingly, though you and Sir Rupert think nothing of it. It makes the whole world seem to be going round and round with me like a top.'

‘But so it *does*, my dear,’ reasoned her husband mildly.

‘Very likely, Harry, or at all events I’ll take your word for it; but the pace that this wind-waggon goes with that screw on is something too frightful, and I regret that such a thing was ever invented. It seems to me that we are becoming too clever by half.’

‘Then you may depend upon it, my dear madam,’ said Sir Rupert, ‘that the actual fact is that we are not half clever enough.’

‘I am sure, Sir Rupert, you are very polite—that is, according to your own theory,’ answered his hostess sharply.

‘Your wish is *my* law at all events, Dodo,’ observed her husband affectionately, ‘if it is not that of the universe. Charley, back her.’

Charley, who had only caught the last sentence (having been engaged in whispering a wish into Lotty’s ear on his own private account), at once produced his cigar-case.

‘I wish you may get it,’ said his aunt promptly.

‘And he *has* got it—sharp,’ observed his uncle, laughing.

But Mrs. Raymond was in no mood for laughter. There is no woman so sweet-tempered but that she is apt to be irritable when that mid-day meal, which from the earliest dawn of civilisation has been to the female what dinner is to the male, has been postponed for half-an-hour. If the whole of her sentient being could, so to speak, have been realised at that moment, it would have expressed itself in one long passionate cry for Lunch.

## CHAPTER IV.

### THE MUSEUM.

THE question of opening museums upon a Sunday was still as much debated in Parliament as ever—Sir Rupert, by-the-by, voting against it, because it so strongly recommended itself to his common sense,—but Mr. Raymond always made a point of exhibiting his collection of old-world curiosities upon Christmas Day. He disposed of the old lots every year, to buyers if possible, but if not, in the cellars, and procured others of a later epoch; and his present miscellany happened to be formed out of materials of the date of 1877.

‘I shall have the honour, ladies and gentlemen,’ said he, as he led the way to the museum after luncheon, ‘of showing you this afternoon some very remarkable examples of our ancestors, with illustrations of what is vulgarly termed their “goings on,” though, as a matter of fact, they scarcely moved on at all, or, when they did, only like a mill-horse.’

The museum was a magnificent apartment, lit by painted windows, mostly of a green colour, so as to throw a dim and therefore appropriate tint upon the crude inventions of the past, and also perhaps to charitably conceal the defects of our ancestors' effigies, scores of whom, as large as life, and habited in the costume of their time, loomed through the gloom.

'This will serve for my wand as showman,' said Mr. Raymond, selecting a long peeled twig, much frayed at the end, from a bunch of them which hung from a neighbouring wall, 'though it was once put to a more ignoble use.'

'Why, that's a cream-whipper,' exclaimed the hostess, 'surely.'

'You are very nearly right, Dodo,' answered her husband approvingly, 'which is as much as can be reasonably expected of any woman. This is a cream-whipper in one sense, since it was used to whip the cream of the youthful aristocracy of this country: it is a fragment of a birch used at Eton in the year of grace 1877, and applied—ahem—well, that is better left unexplained. It is sufficient to say that a most offensively indelicate custom was permitted to exist at that seminary from the reign of Henry VI. until that of Victoria. Its discontinuance, indeed, was only owing to an engraving of the punishment published in an illustrated paper (very properly prosecuted, by-the-by, for the offence under the Act which takes its name from the Poet Campbell), and which for the first time opened the eyes of the public (very wide indeed) to the existence of the scandal.'

'Surely,' said Sir Rupert, 'there must have been some reason for its having had so long a lease?'

'There was an excellent reason, sir; a guinea a year was paid for each boy for birch, whether employed in his correction or not; a fact which swelled the list of school offences in those boys who had been brought up on economical principles, and were resolved to get their money's worth out of the article in question. Here is a public schoolboy of the period, with a brass instrument beside him, whose use is uncertain; some say it is a Jewish harp, played with the teeth, but others are of opinion that from it was extracted that mysterious attribute called "the tone," of which so much was heard and so little seen, and for which three or four great public schools had the patent. The possession of it, for each boy, was valued at two hundred pounds a year, and is supposed (perhaps because Etonians always wore tall hats) to be analogous to castoreum in the beaver. Let us remove the skull of this very gentlemanly youth, and see what was taught him for that money. The brain, you will remark, is in parallel lines, resulting from its almost exclusive application to Latin verse, which was performed mechan-

ically by an instrument called a *gradus*. No allowance was made at any of those great seminaries for individual character; a boy of genius was made to grind at his Latin verses just as if he had been a fool: thus the great principle of that epoch, the repression of ideas, was maintained in its integrity.'

'But how long, Harry, did they persevere upon this system with downright stupid boys, like our dear Charley?' inquired Mrs. Raymond.

'For ever—that is to say, until they were boys no longer. It was not until half a century afterwards that it was discovered that reading, writing, and arithmetic are the only things that a stupid boy can comprehend, and the only things which a clever boy cannot quite easily learn for himself. That you may fill your average boy with classics, mathematics, the use of the globes, and all the ologies, only to make an intolerable prig of him and a nuisance to society after all, was not understood by this purblind race; nor were the sufferings of their juvenile incapables under the educational harrow taken into account.'

'And yet they had the proverb, "One can't make a silk purse out of a sow's ear,"' mused Sir Rupert, 'as well as we.'

'True, but there were a good many persons interested in the manufactory who swore they could. Moreover, the prizes at the Universities, Fellowships and such like, were mostly conferred on proficient in the Latin verse business, which gave it, so far, a practical value. There were arguments by the score, you may depend upon it, in favour of everything—I daresay even of this fellow.'

He pointed to a figure attired as a mechanic of the period, but whose garments seemed to have been made for some other person. His mouth was open, which gave a weak expression to a countenance otherwise wily enough; and his hand, which he had a curious habit of moistening with his lips, though it was far from white, showed not a trace of toil.

'That's an agitator, ladies and gentlemen. A self-appointed professional adviser of the British workman. Where there was discontent he fostered it; where there was none, he begot it; where there was a hope of reconciliation between man and master, he stepped in and trampled it out. And yet there was nothing more surprising in his existence than that a fungus grows upon a rotten soil. The relations between labour and capital were deemed even by political economists to be antagonistic. The system of co-operation was but beginning, and that of bonus profits to be unknown—absolutely unknown. In place of mutual understanding, there was suspicion—upon one side a stubborn gloom which

called itself independence; on the other, a truculent selfishness, which bore falsely the same name. The weapon which he holds aloft was even more destructive to those whose battle he pretended to fight than to their opponents.'

'Why, it looks like a mere roll of paper,' observed Lotty.

'Yet it was used to Strike with. It is the member-list of a Trade Union. With that he dashed the food from the workman's child, and with the same blow palsied the hands of Trade. It must be admitted that this eloquent gentleman never himself did a stroke of work in his life, but, on the other hand, he never wanted a good dinner. And, curiously enough, both masters and men encouraged him, by admitting that self-interest was the only rule of life.'

'Was that the period of what was called the Civil Wars?' suggested Charley modestly.

'No, my boy; it was long posterior to it.'

'Then the introduction of Christianity must have taken place quite lately?'

'My dear Dodo, you must look after that boy's head,' said Mr. Raymond gravely.

'Good gracious, why, Harry?' inquired his wife with apprehension.

'Because, if I am not mistaken, he's getting ideas into it.'

'My dear Mr. Raymond, who is this exceedingly well-dressed person in polished leather boots?' inquired Lotty, pointing to a gentlemanlike figure, who with a languid air was surveying universal nature through a race-glass.

'Oh! that's a very funny fellow indeed. He is an hereditary legislator.'

'What *do* you mean, Mr. Raymond? Born so?'

'Well, he was supposed to be born so.'

'But you don't mean that the genius for legislation was supposed to be inherited?'

'Certainly not; there was no genius about it. Titles of nobility were not bestowed (except in the rarest instances) for public service at all; but on illegitimate branches of the Royal Family, political adherents of Government (especially if they were renegades), on rich men because they were rich, and on just a few soldiers to give a colour to the institution; they were red, you know.'

'Soldiers?' said Lotty.

'Yes, I'll tell you about *them* presently. Let me finish with this gentleman first. Well, so enamoured were our ancestors of their Peers when they had made them, that they fell in love with their sons also; and, having flattered and fawned upon them from

their cradles, so that it was next to impossible that the poor young men could turn out otherwise than vain and selfish, they took away from them every incitement to exertion by decreeing that they should enjoy their fathers' titles. After a generation or two of a family had accomplished the feat of succeeding to their ancestors, the public adulation of them passed all bounds and assumed the form of fetish; and the famous verse:

‘Let law, religion, virtue, morals, die;  
But leave us still our old nobility,’

was added to the National Anthem.’

‘But did not the absurdity of his position strike the hereditary legislator himself, uncle?’

‘Not a bit of it; I lift his skull. There is, you observe, no sense of humour. Here are the parallel lines, which show he came from a public school, only fainter and softer; here is a gap which held the Latin quotations he used in the House of Lords—so he was up to that, you see. There are also traces of arithmetic, by help of which he made up his betting-book.’

‘There’s something written in his brain,’ said Lotty, standing on tiptoe, and peering into the cavity of the skull.

‘Ah! that’s something that was inculcated so strongly that it got stereotyped—probably some sort of apology for his position in life suggested by his friends. I thought so—*The small end of the wedge*. That was the metaphor he always kept by him to use against the reformers. “Touch me and you open the floodgates”—upon my life, I believe Sir Rupert agrees with him.’

‘I do, and I can’t help it, Raymond. The gentleman you say was ill-educated, spoilt from his cradle, and debarred from all incitement to exertion; consequently, the very last sort of person to be intrusted with the duties of legislating. Now, according to my theory—the golden Rule of Contrary—this is just the sort of person to be made a peer.’

‘Oh my, what a guy!’ exclaimed Charley suddenly. The exclamation was evoked by a figure of defiant aspect, but with his limbs so awkwardly put together that it was a marvel how they supported him.

‘Ah! that is a self-made man,’ explained Mr. Raymond, ‘the very opposite of the case we have just been considering. He is not an attractive member of society to look at, but then he is independent of public opinion. Lift his skull, Charley, and reveal his sentiments. You won’t find *his* brain in parallel lines, I reckon. He never went to school at all, but educated himself; “the only kind of education, sir,” as he used to say, “worth having.” That accounted for his original method of spelling.’

'But it is in parallel lines, uncle,' exclaimed Charley, investigating what the gentleman used to term his 'ED.' He's as full of poetry as an egg's full of meat.'

'Poetry!' exclaimed Mr. Raymond. 'He did nothing but prose—and all about his getting on in the world. Read it out.'

'It's certainly verses, uncle :

A pin a day's a groat a year,  
A penny saved is a penny got.'

'Oh, what fun ! Did he think it rhyme ? Let me look,' cried Lotty, laughing.

'No, no ; it's not a nice brain to look at,' said Mr. Raymond ; 'it's full of old saws.'

'Lor, how nasty,' said Mrs. Raymond ; 'the poor man's brain was diseased then ?'

'It was, my dear—with ignorance and self-conceit. And yet the admiration of the vulgar was in the times we are considering divided between him and their idol in the patent leathers.'

'And which did they like best ?' asked Charley.

'Well, the Hereditary Legislator was the idler of the two. There were a few good men of both sets, but the failures became so frequent and notorious that Life Peerages were invented (the idea of *merit* did not occur even then till the next century), and men were forbidden to make themselves at all.<sup>1</sup> Here is another gentleman much looked up to in his day, and invested with many imaginary qualities—prudence, acuteness, modesty, and especially a sense of the value of time. That is a Man of Business.'

'And what did *he* do, uncle ?'

'Business. It was a very mysterious profession, but extensively followed. Its professors laid claim to magic powers. You have heard of Archimedes ?'

'Yes ; he was a screw,' replied Charley promptly.

'Well, I daresay this gentleman was one also. I was about to observe, however, that Archimedes boasted if you gave him a stand-point he could move the world (in fact he has one, and in a sense does move it). These gentry likewise boasted, no matter what their pecuniary difficulties, that if you gave them twenty-four hours to turn round in—'

'Like the sun,' remarked Mrs. Raymond.

'No, my darling, not quite the sun, nor even *very near* the sun, you mean the earth,—if you gave them twenty-four hours to turn round in, they could find any amount of money. It is true they never did it, but everybody (except their creditors) believed

<sup>1</sup> The practice, if not the theory, of 'spontaneous generation' was thus knocked on the head at once.

they could. They sat on high stools from ten to five and even longer daily, to perform their incantations, and I daresay if you lift the skull of this particular specimen, you will find some of their cabalistic phrases—*Your favour of the 14th instant has been duly received.* Yes, that is one of them, my lad. They never set about anything without some preface of that kind; it is supposed to be some relic of the Jewish custom (for many of them were Jews) of using phylacteries, only, instead of pasting them on their foreheads, they stuck them at the beginning of their letters. The system of Verbiage was very popular among our ancestors, and especially among members of the legal profession. Here is a law document of the period, written on vellum—for, after taking all the wool from their victims, they even used their skins—written, you observe, in characters well nigh inscrutable, and which, if perused, would be utterly unintelligible to what was called “the General Reader”—an individual named after Sir Rupert’s plan, because he never read that nor anything else. This was called a “conveyance.”

‘Lor!’ exclaimed Mrs. Raymond.

‘You may say that, my dear; and a very expensive branch of it it was. This deed puts the fortunate client in possession of a property worth fifty pounds, and charges forty-five pounds for the writing and the vellum.’

‘That was before the invention of printing,’ observed Charley, with the air of one who imparts information gratuitously, ‘and anterior to the birth of Winkyn de Worde.’

‘My dear Dodo, you must really look to that boy’s head. No, my lad, there was a great deal of winking at extortion among the lawyers of those days, and a great many words.’

‘Yes, taking these good folks all round,’ mused Sir Rupert, ‘I should suppose the lawyers were the greatest shams and humbugs of the whole set.’

‘I don’t know *that*,’ answered Mr. Raymond laughing. ‘*Place aux Dames.* Look at this young lady, if you want a thorough-paced impostor a hundred years old.

‘But she is *not* a hundred years old, uncle; and she’s very pretty,’ observed Charley, regarding with no little interest a girl of the period, to whom Mr. Raymond had drawn attention.

‘I confess I see little in her to admire,’ said Lotty frigidly. ‘In the first place she is not properly balanced.’

‘Ah! that is because of her high heels,’ explained Mr. Raymond; ‘it was thought attractive to lean forward and to limp. She would have fallen on her nose, but that the centre of gravity was put farther back by the weight of her chignon—a bunch of dead people’s hair worn at the back of the head.’

'Then she was false from head to heel,' remarked Lotty contemptuously.

'Well, I am afraid she has very little to stand upon—except her rights. It was the era of Woman's Rights, you know, when the sex first began to insist upon their intelligence, and assert they were not the slaves of fashion they were supposed to be. Who has taken your fancy there, Lotty?'

'I don't know,' said Lotty, 'but I never saw anyone so striking before.'

'Well, upon my life,' observed Charley, 'I see nothing in him, except that he is preposterously dressed.'

'Oh, that's a soldier,' explained Mr. Raymond, 'a very useful fellow, let me tell you, at one time, and always ornamental. He was, in fact, a carver and gilder, and in his leisure hours the ingenious fellow turned the heads of his fellow-countrywomen.'

'And why haven't we got him now?' inquired Lotty with interest.

'Because carving (on any considerable scale) is abolished; it became impossible, you remember, when the secret of propagating miasma was discovered. It is a humiliating reflection, that what all the arguments of humanity and civilisation failed to accomplish was brought to pass by a nasty smell. There was indeed an attempt made to counteract it by means of smelling-bottles, but the spectacle of a Field-Marshal (not to mention the inferior officers) holding a smelling-bottle to his nose, instead of a *bâton*, was found to be too ridiculous even for the French. War became (literally) in such bad odour that it had to be abolished.'

'Where did the patent miasma come from, uncle?' inquired Charley.

'From the Ashantees. It was the only thing we took from them in our last campaign, and at that time it was about the last thing from which we anticipated any advantage.'

'Which is another proof,' observed Sir Rupert, '(if proof were wanting) of the truth of my theory.'

'How *does* this fellow manage to keep his hat on at the back of his head?' inquired Charley suddenly. 'He must have a peg inside, surely.'

'Not at all; that is the famous British sailor. How his hat was stuck on puzzled all the mathematicians for centuries, but in the end was the humble cause of the true theory of attraction being brought to light. It was supposed at one time that the earth was a universal magnet; that was the theory of Sir Isaac Walton (discovered by fishing with a plummet); and though divines and other pious persons asserted that the world itself had

no attraction for *them*, nobody believed them. We have by no means exhausted the museum, gentlemen and ladies, but I perceive that information is having its usual effect upon my excellent wife, and she has gone fast asleep.'

'I was only nodding adhesion to your remarks, Harry,' answered the good lady indignantly; 'and have never even closed my eyes.'

'Curious,' observed Mr. Raymond to Sir Rupert, as they all left the room, 'that no woman (save in a fairy story) has ever owned to falling asleep in the daytime, except under chloroform.'

## CHAPTER V.

### ADIPOCERE.

EVERY system, however excellent, has its drawbacks, and must by no means be denounced on that account; in that of 'length of service,' for instance (which succeeded promotion by purchase and patronage), it was undoubtedly an inconvenience that, in order to become governor of a gaol, a candidate had to enter as a convict and *work his way up*; and, similarly, the admirable enactment, that no one shall talk about what he neither understands nor wishes to understand (and which has so wholesomely swept away all dissertations on art and metaphysics), is not without its dark side. Conversation is apt to languish in consequence—especially in the country and on Sundays and red-letter days, where there is no go-bang in well-regulated drawing-rooms—matters often come to a standstill. At such a time even that noble system of credit, which has made England what she is, fails to revive a limited company, for one cannot credit a man with ideas when we know him to possess none. Hence the melancholy which (I again repeat, in well-regulated households, and after the church services have been attended) pervades the British race upon Sundays and Holy days. So deep was the social gloom at Mellington Hall that the Christmas oratorio was turned on to the drawing-room from the Crystal Palace in order to dispel it. It is needless to say that this had the contrary effect; for, if 'a little music' is a dangerous thing, how much more to be dreaded is the bassoon and other huge, though harmonious, reptiles necessary to the due performance of the 'Creation.' To listen patiently to inarticulate sounds while staring at one's fellow-creatures, demands a peculiar education, or all events the absence of a general one. Such performances may soothe the savage breast, but they irritate others to the verge of madness, unless Nature's mitigator, Sleep, slides in and saves them. Mrs. Raymond was as fast as a church. Lotty, I fear,

only pretended to be so, so that she need not reprove Charley for stealing his arm round her waist as they sat together on the sofa. Sir Rupert sat opposite them, wondering in his philosophic mind whether the young gentleman was really comfortable. 'A man could take his own life, but *could* he steal his own arm.' (If the 'Creation' would have stopped for a moment he might have worked this out lucidly enough, but as it was he got confused.)

She could doubtless steel her heart, but that again would require an iron will.' There was something wrong in this logic; he denied its major, or its minor, but he did not know which; he only knew that a major could not have been a minor at any period after promotion by purchase had been done away with. He was aware that he was trifling with his own intelligence, but how could he help it while that Bumble Bee was being made; there is nothing in the 'Creation' (for noise) to be compared to the Bumble Bee.

*And what had become of Mr. Raymond?* It was really intolerable that a man calling himself one's host should get an oratorio turned on upon one—so that if a man so much as sneezed people said, 'Hush'—and then sneak away to enjoy himself somewhere. For his own part, he should have thought better, much better, of Raymond—which was, however, only another proof (if proof were wanting) of the correctness of his theory. 'When a man withdraws himself from his family circle, not to say from an honoured and important guest, upon a Christmas afternoon,' reasoned Sir Rupert (as well as the singing in his ears permitted him to do), 'there must be something in it, you know.' There must be some very strong attraction—ay, ATTRACTION. That was Raymond's pet theory. No doubt his absence had to do with that great secret to the very verge of which he had confessed his investigations had carried him. 'I will stake my existence he is experimentalising.'

Now a scientific experiment going on, and especially another man's experiment, was to Sir Rupert what a neighbour's preserve is to a sportsman. It was a direct invitation to trespass. Mrs. Raymond was not only still asleep, but contributing a little quota to the oratorio upon her own account; the young people were much engaged—or, if they were not, they ought to have been—and would probably not observe his departure from the room; and (better than all) the Bumble Bee was still in process of creation. Under its wing (as it were) he could creep away. He did so, and softly closed the door behind him. The great hall was in semi-darkness, for Mr. Raymond not only inveighed against the extravagance of others with respect to the solar rays, but economised them himself on principle; his race were celebrated for their consistency;

'Heaven help me,' said his father the Dean, when praised for this quality, 'if *my* practice is not better than *my* preaching.' No reflection, however (perhaps on account of the gloom of the hall), intruded itself upon Sir Rupert, in connection with his host's wishes; to confess the truth, he was jealous of him. Why should one man have ten thousand a year, and another only one solitary idea—the Rule of Contrary? At present, it is true, Sir Rupert was a Knight, and therefore a few hours (so to speak) in advance of his friend; but what if Raymond should wrest from nature some tremendous secret, and, for making it appear, be made a peer himself?

'This cove even now imagines himself a Bey (to use the Eastern imagery of our ancestors),' muttered Sir Rupert between his false teeth; 'and there will be no bounds to his arrogance if he really hits upon anything substantial.'

At this moment Sir Rupert's shin hit upon something so exceedingly substantial, and with such a sharp edge to it (it was the scuttle, in which those expensive coals had come), that he made use of an imprecation.

Instead of taking this accident as a rebuke to his evil thoughts, or a warning against prying curiosity, Sir Rupert's mind was more than ever fixed on effecting his purpose, for it flashed to court-plaster and then (by a natural association of ideas) to the title he imagined his friend to be upon the point of earning.

Mr. Raymond's study was situated (no one knew why at that time, though ill-natured people made foolish guesses about it) below the basement floor and next to the cellar, and thither Sir Rupert cautiously made his way. When he reached the door he stopped and listened at the keyhole. After about five minutes, during which he heard nothing, he lifted his head and murmured,—

'This is very discreditable, and I will never demean myself to such an action on any future occasion.'

Then he softly opened the door; all was dark; he advanced and came into violent contact with some soft substance.

'This is not the first time,' he remarked complacently, 'that my head' (and he rubbed it) 'has been acquainted with bays.'

He now remembered that the study had double doors, but at the same time (in accordance with the inexorable rule of compensation) forgot his recent good resolution, and immediately listened again. All was silent as before. He opened the green-baize door, and looked in.

The interior of Mr. Raymond's study presented much the same appearance as the sanctum of any other *savant* of our day, except that the contents showed a more Catholic mind (the Pope's treatment of Galileo having always set men of science rather against

him). In addition to the usual scientific appliances, such as for dredging in the upper stratas of the atmosphere, and for weighing the sun (the results of which have of late years told so sad a story), there were some very curious psychological instruments—heart-reflectors, mind-reflectors, and machines for turning light on people's motives generally—the sight of which ought to have brought a blush into Sir Rupert's cheek. But since Mr. Raymond was not in the study, Sir Rupert (so greatly did his intellectual faculties preponderate over the moral) saw no reason to blush, and he never did anything without a reason. Upon the table were various MSS. in his host's handwriting, and even over these private memoranda he did not hesitate to cast his eye, in hopes to appropriate an idea. I am glad to say they were most of them beyond him.

There was one MS., however, the ink of which he might have observed, had not his mind been so fixed on plagiarism, was still wet, on which his eye fastened like a leech.

'The theory of the Central Fire,' it began, 'held by Humboldt early in the nineteenth century, but abandoned by later generations on account of its supposed interference with the precession of the equinoxes, attracted once more, upon the better appreciation of that popular spectacle, the attention of science. It has been reserved, however, for the humble individual who pens these lines not only to prove its existence, but, as I venture to hope, to utilise it for our hearts and homes.'

'By the living jingo,' cried Sir Rupert softly, 'this is the very thing. Ho, ho! he's after the Central Fire, is he? Why, that is the very last thing surely that any man would have dreamt of utilising (which proves, by-the-by—if proof were wanting—the correctness of my theory). You are a most ingenious fellow, Raymond, I allow. It is not always, however, the discoverer of an invention who gets the patent for it.' Then he read on:

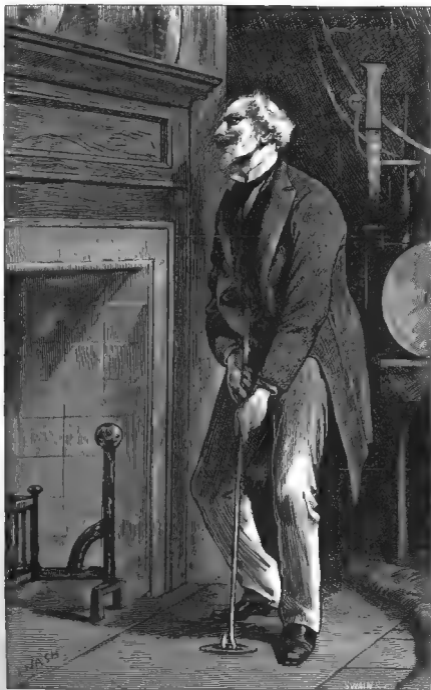
'If I succeed, not only will there be no more necessity to borrow a single ray from the sun's surface, but it is possible that we may be able to repay it for its past advances, and even set apart a handsome percentage in return for its countenance during the late pressure. I say "if I succeed," for the next five minutes may see me reduced to cinders, annihilated, like a second Prometheus for my audacity; *he*, however, stole fire from heaven, while it is my humble ambition only to withdraw a little of the surplus incandescence from what is euphoniously termed "another place."

(This term, as everyone knows, is the parliamentary phrase used in the House of Commons for the House of Lords, and the mention of it excited Sir Rupert's unhappy jealousy of his friend beyond all bounds.)

'He shall never be a peer if I can help it,' muttered he for the second time, and cast his eyes impatiently about the room, as if in search of some tangible evidence of the experimentalist's success. 'There are no cinders here, and therefore he must have gained his end; and yet he could scarcely have taken his secret with him. What's this?' His eye had lit upon a long steel rod with a hook at one end of it, and close beside it, let into the hearthstone, a small round iron plate with M.P. engraved upon it.

'M.P. stands for Member of Parliament, and that's me,' exclaimed Sir Rupert, too excited to be grammatical. 'It almost seems as though it was fated. This is the Model of the Patent, no doubt; and if I carry it off and get it registered, then I shall be the patentee. I shall not deny that Raymond thought of it independently; he will not find me illiberal in that respect; only it must be understood that I thought of it *first*. I have only to fix the hook in this ring, and pull the plate up. Then we shall see what we *shall* see, as the children say. Here goes.' And he raised the plate by about a quarter of an inch. As he did so a jet of flame (like that used by glass-blowers at the Polytechnic) shot out from the orifice, and in one instant Sir Rupert was nowhere. I am aware that that is a sporting term, but I use it advisedly, and if I have caused offence by doing so, I beg to repeat it. In this sober scientific narrative, to tell the plain truth has been my only object. Sir Rupert was nowhere.

The moment after he had evanesced, a little door opened in the wall, and out came Mr. Raymond, who had been only washing his hands in the cupboard. His attire since we beheld him in the drawing-room had undergone considerable change. At his back he wore a quiver, like Cupid, which, however, on closer inspection had more resemblance to a pillar letter-box—this was an extingtor or flame extinguisher. Moreover, he had exchanged his Christmas garments for a suit of old 'dittos,' which his wife had for years endeavoured to persuade him to give away. He was far from being parsimonious, and delighted in novelties, but he liked old clothes and old friends. 'I have found a use for these at last, dear Dodo,' mused he in a tender voice as he surveyed himself in the mirror. 'If anything happens, these will be quite good enough to be fried in, for the moment has now come for a peerage or Westminster Abbey. Good gracious! What a smell of sulphur matches!' He hastily approached the hearthstone, and carefully examined the iron plate. 'I do believe,' said he, 'that somebody has been meddling with the main plug.' A round spot of grease upon the floor, about the same size as that which drops off a tallow candle (sixteen to the pound), here attracted his attention.



'THEN WE SHALL SEE WHAT WE SHALL SEE'

'Adipocere!' exclaimed he, with horror, not, however, unmixed with scientific interest. 'This was once a human being, and now through merely opening a fire plug—a Central Fire plug—' Emotion choked his utterance. 'Thank Heaven, it cannot be Dodo or Lotty,' murmured he presently; 'they are women, but they would never pry into my secrets. It can't be Charley, because (though he is such a fool) he is a gentleman. It can't be Duncombe, or any of the servants, because they're afraid to enter the study on account of the electrical machine. It must therefore be poor Sir Rupert! Who would have thought to look at that tiny spot that a minute ago it was a live knight (a knight banneret he used to call himself, and perhaps it was so, for nobody contradicted him) and a member of the British Legislature? If he were only alive, poor dear, to see himself thus, he would say it was only one more proof (if proof were wanting) of the correctness of his theory, that everything looks as different as possible from what it is, or at all events from what it was. Adipocere! He had always a fancy for being in the Encyclopædia, and there he is. This is very curious.' (Here an idea appeared to strike Mr. Raymond, for he took out his pocket-book and made a rough note.) '*It has always puzzled anatomists and homicides how to dispose of a dead body. Well, nothing is easier. Reduce it to adipocere, and then, with a piece of brown paper and a hot iron above it remove the spot.*' Mr. Raymond suited the action to the word, so that nothing in fact remained of the great advocate of the Rule of Contrary but a slight stain on the brown paper about the size of half a crown. He might have been applied with vinegar for a bruise, and nobody would have been any the wiser.

'It is better so,' murmured Mr. Raymond, regarding this memento of his friend with pitying eyes—'it is better so than that there should be a row about it. It is true I am a magistrate, but not even a magistrate is bound to commit *himself* (though he often does it). Besides, there is absolutely nothing (or at all events not enough) for any coroner to sit upon. I shall not even tell Dodo; for she will be sure to say, it all comes of working in one's laboratory upon a Christmas Day. As for this Central Fire experiment, the subject has become too painful to be pursued at present.' Then, blowing (as his custom was when greatly moved), Mr. Raymond ascended to the drawing-room, where he found all (save one, and 'ah, the difference to *him*!') much as he left them.

'Why, Dodo, you were asleep!' exclaimed he playfully.

'No, Harry, I was only keeping time to the oratorio; I do assure you I have never closed my eyes.'

'Nor Charley and Lotty their mouths,' said Mr. Raymond,

turning to the young people with an air of gaiety that it cost him much to assume. 'What *can* you two find to talk about?'

'One another,' answered Charley simply.

'That's better than talking of oneself,' observed Mrs. Raymond, eager to shield her nephew from the consequences of this imprudent speech; 'and, *by-the-by*, where is Sir Rupert?'

'He—he—he,' said Mr. Raymond; he was not laughing; it was no laughing matter: he was hesitating; lying was not his *forte*, nor his weakness. 'He—he has gone away.'

'Gone away! why, where's he gone to?'

'Ah! that I don't know,' answered Mr. Raymond eagerly; it was a relief to him to be able to tell the literal truth.

'But this is shocking, Harry; he must have been offended with us. People will say that you made your house too hot to hold him.'

'I hope not,' sighed Mr. Raymond, with a shudder. 'Let us talk of somebody else.'

What became of Sir Rupert never was discovered. The disappearance of the Hon. Member had been so complete (the Government organs said 'so satisfactory') that there was no end to the unnatural suggestions made by the press to account for it. Even the 'Times,' the only high priced (farthing) paper we have left, could find no more common-place solution than that a Cannibal Society must have been established amongst us (inexcusable considering the sheep lozenges), and that Sir Rupert had fallen their first victim—the First of a Series. The effects of this were temporarily shocking, for nervous people went about catching rashes, measles, and other harmless but objectionable-looking complaints, in order to render themselves uninviting to the palate. The real secret was confided one day after dinner by Mr. Raymond to his brother the Dean, over a bottle of claret with the yellow seal; the seal of confession, as you would think, under the circumstances; yet the ecclesiastic, being a strong Protestant, did not hesitate to publish the main features of the story in a little tract, called 'Playing with Fire; a Caution to Young People.' His wife, who was a fashionable authoress, used the same materials for a thirty-three volume novel, entitled 'Adipocere,' so there has been really no breach of confidence in my relating the incident as it actually occurred.

## My New Year's Eve among the Mummies.

BY J. ARBUTHNOT WILSON.

I HAVE been a wanderer and a vagabond on the face of the earth for a good many years now, and I have certainly had some odd adventures in my time ; but I can assure you, I never spent twenty-four queerer hours than those which I passed some twelve months since in the great unopened Pyramid of Abu Yilla.

The way I got there was itself a very strange one. I had come to Egypt for a winter tour with the Fitz-Simkinses, to whose daughter Editha I was at that precise moment engaged. You will probably remember that old Fitz-Simkins belonged originally to the wealthy firm of Simkinson and Stokoe, worshipful vintners ; but when the senior partner retired from the business and got his knighthood, the College of Heralds opportunely discovered that his ancestors had changed their fine old Norman name for its English equivalent some time about the reign of King Richard I. ; and they immediately authorised the old gentleman to resume the patronymic and the armorial bearings of his distinguished forefathers. It's really quite astonishing how often these curious coincidences crop up at the College of Heralds.

Of course it was a great catch for a landless and briefless barrister like myself—dependent on a small fortune in South American securities, and my precarious earnings as a writer of burlesque—to secure such a valuable prospective property as Editha Fitz-Simkins. To be sure, the girl was undeniably plain ; but I have known plainer girls than she was, whom forty thousand pounds converted into My Ladies : and if Editha hadn't really fallen over head and ears in love with me, I suppose old Fitz-Simkins would never have consented to such a match. As it was, however, we had flirted so openly and so desperately during the Scarborough season, that it would have been difficult for Sir Peter to break it off : and so I had come to Egypt on a tour of insurance to secure my prize, following in the wake of my future mother-in-law, whose lungs were supposed to require a genial climate—though in my private opinion they were really as creditable a pair of pulmonary appendages as ever drew breath.

Nevertheless, the course of our true love did not run so smoothly as might have been expected. Editha found me less ardent than a devoted squire should be ; and on the very last night of the old

year she got up a regulation lovers' quarrel, because I had sneaked away from the boat that afternoon, under the guidance of our dragoman, to witness the seductive performances of some fair Ghawázi, the dancing girls of a neighbouring town. How she found it out heaven only knows, for I gave that rascal Dimitri five piastres to hold his tongue: but she did find it out somehow, and chose to regard it as an offence of the first magnitude: a mortal sin only to be expiated by three days of penance and humiliation.

I went to bed that night, in my hammock on deck, with feelings far from satisfactory. We were moored against the bank at Abu Yilla, the most pestiferous hole between the cataracts and the Delta. The mosquitoes were worse than the ordinary mosquitoes of Egypt, and that is saying a great deal. The heat was oppressive even at night, and the malaria from the lotus beds rose like a palpable mist before my eyes. Above all, I was getting doubtful whether Editha Fitz-Simkins might not after all slip between my fingers. I felt wretched and feverish: and yet I had delightful interlusive recollections, in between, of that lovely little Gháziyah, who danced that exquisite, marvellous, entrancing, delicious, and awfully oriental dance that I saw in the afternoon.

By Jove, she *was* a beautiful creature. Eyes like two full moons; hair like Milton's Penserose; movements like a poem of Swinburne's set to action. If Editha was only a faint picture of that girl now! Upon my word, I was falling in love with a Gháziyah!

Then the mosquitoes came again. Buzz—buzz—buzz. I make a lunge at the loudest and biggest, a sort of prima donna in their infernal opera. I kill the prima donna, but ten more shrill performers come in its place. The frogs croak dismally in the reedy shallows. The night grows hotter and hotter still. At last, I can stand it no longer. I rise up, dress myself lightly, and jump ashore to find some way of passing the time.

Yonder, across the flat, lies the great unopened Pyramid of Abu Yilla. We are going to-morrow to climb to the top; but I will take a turn to reconnoitre in that direction now. I walk across the moonlit fields, my soul still divided between Editha and the Gháziyah, and approach the solemn mass of huge, antiquated granite blocks standing out so grimly against the pale horizon. I feel half awake, half asleep, and altogether feverish: but I poke about the base in an aimless sort of way, with a vague idea that I may perhaps discover by chance the secret of its sealed entrance, which has ere now baffled so many pertinacious explorers and learned Egyptologists.

As I walk along the base, I remember old Herodotus's story, like a page from the 'Arabian Nights,' of how King Rhampsinitus built himself a treasury, wherein one stone turned on a pivot like a door; and how the builder availed himself of this his cunning device to steal gold from the king's storehouse. Suppose the entrance to the unopened Pyramid should be by such a door. It would be curious if I should chance to light upon the very spot.

I stood in the broad moonlight, near the north-east angle of the great pile, at the twelfth stone from the corner. A random fancy struck me, that I might turn this stone by pushing it inward on the left side. I leant against it with all my weight, and tried to move it on the imaginary pivot. Did it give way a fraction of an inch? No, it must have been mere fancy. Let me try again. Surely it is yielding! Gracious Osiris, it has moved an inch or more! My heart beats fast, either with fever or excitement, and I try a third time. The rust of centuries on the pivot wears slowly off, and the stone turns ponderously round, giving access to a low dark passage.

It must have been madness which led me to enter the forgotten corridor, alone, without torch or match, at that hour of the evening: but at any rate, I entered. The passage was tall enough for a man to walk erect, and I could feel, as I groped slowly along, that the wall was composed of smooth polished granite, while the floor sloped away downward with a slight but regular descent. I walked with trembling heart and faltering feet for some forty or fifty yards down the mysterious vestibule: and then I felt myself brought suddenly to a standstill by a block of stone placed right across the pathway. I had had nearly enough for one evening, and I was preparing to return to the boat, agog with my new discovery, when my attention was suddenly arrested by an incredible, a perfectly miraculous fact.

The block of stone which barred the passage was faintly visible as a square, by means of a struggling belt of light streaming through the seams. There must be a lamp or other flame burning within. What if this were a door like the outer one, leading into a chamber perhaps inhabited by some dangerous band of outcasts? The light was a sure evidence of human occupation: and yet the outer door swung rustily on its pivot as though it had never been opened for ages. I paused a moment in fear before I ventured to try the stone: and then, urged on once more by some insane impulse, I turned the massive block with all my might to the left. It gave way slowly like its neighbour, and finally opened into the central hall.

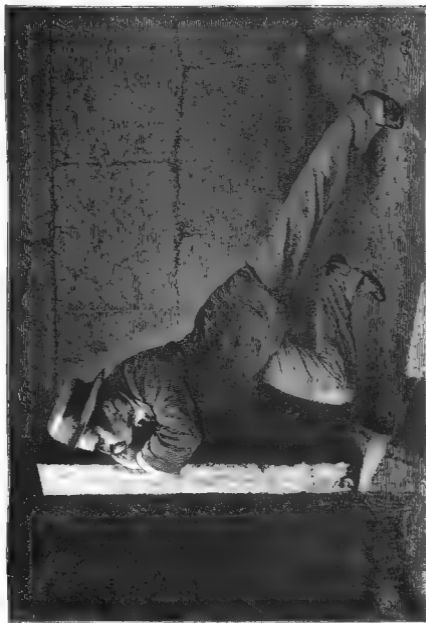
Never as long as I live shall I forget the ecstasy of terror, astonishment, and blank dismay which seized upon me when I

stepped into that seemingly enchanted chamber. A blaze of light first burst upon my eyes, from jets of gas arranged in regular rows tier above tier, upon the columns and walls of the vast apartment. Huge pillars, richly painted with red, yellow, blue, and green decorations, stretched in endless succession down the dazzling aisles. A floor of polished syenite reflected the splendour of the lamps, and afforded a base for red granite sphinxes and dark purple images in porphyry of the cat-faced goddess Pasht, whose form I knew so well at the Louvre and the British Museum. But I had no eyes for any of these lesser marvels, being wholly absorbed in the greatest marvel of all: for there, in royal state and with mitred head, a living Egyptian king, surrounded by his coiffured court, was banqueting in the flesh upon a real throne, before a table laden with Memphian delicacies!

I stood transfixed with awe and amazement, my tongue and my feet alike forgetting their office, and my brain whirling round and round, as I remember it used to whirl when my health broke down utterly at Cambridge after the Classical Tripos. I gazed fixedly at the strange picture before me, taking in all its details in a confused way, yet quite incapable of understanding or realising any part of its true import. I saw the king in the centre of the hall, raised on a throne of granite inlaid with gold and ivory; his head crowned with the peaked cap of Rameses, and his curled hair flowing down his shoulders in a set and formal frizz. I saw priests and warriors on either side, dressed in the costumes which I had often carefully noted in our great collections; while bronze-skinned maids, with light garments round their waists, and limbs displayed in graceful picturesqueness, waited upon them, half nude, as in the wall paintings which we had lately examined at Karnak and Syene. I saw the ladies, clothed from head to foot in dyed linen garments, sitting apart in the background, banqueting by themselves at a separate table; while dancing girls, like older representatives of my yesternoon friends, the Ghawázi, tumbled before them in strange attitudes, to the music of four-stringed harps and long straight pipes. In short, I beheld as in a dream the whole drama of everyday Egyptian royal life, playing itself out anew under my eyes, in its real original properties and personages.

Gradually, as I looked, I became aware that my hosts were no less surprised at the appearance of their anachronistic guest than was the guest himself at the strange living panorama which met his eyes. In a moment music and dancing ceased; the banquet paused in its course, and the king and his nobles stood up in undisguised astonishment to survey the strange intruder.

Some minutes passed before anyone moved forward on either



A BLAZE OF LIGHT BURST UPON MY EYES.

side. At last a young girl of royal appearance, yet strangely resembling the Gháziyah of Abu Yilla, and recalling in part the laughing maiden in the foreground of Mr. Long's great canvas at the previous Academy, stepped out before the throng.

'May I ask you,' she said in Ancient Egyptian, 'who you are, and why you come hither to disturb us?'

I was never aware before that I spoke or understood the language of the hieroglyphics: yet I found I had not the slightest difficulty in comprehending or answering her question. To say the truth, Ancient Egyptian, though an extremely tough tongue to decipher in its written form, becomes as easy as love-making when spoken by a pair of lips like that Pharaonic princess's. It is really very much the same as English, pronounced in a rapid and somewhat indefinite whisper, and with all the vowels left out.

'I beg ten thousand pardons for my intrusion,' I answered apologetically; 'but I did not know that this Pyramid was inhabited, or I should not have entered your residence so rudely. As for the points you wish to know, I am an English tourist, and you will find my name upon this card;' saying which I handed her one from the case which I had fortunately put into my pocket, with conciliatory politeness. The princess examined it closely, but evidently did not understand its import.

'In return,' I continued, 'may I ask you in what august presence I now find myself by accident?'

A court official stood forth from the throng, and answered in a set heraldic tone: 'In the presence of the illustrious monarch, Brother of the Sun, Thothmes the Twenty-seventh, king of the Eighteenth Dynasty.'

'Salute the Lord of the World,' put in another official in the same regulation drone.

I bowed low to his Majesty, and stepped out into the hall. Apparently my obeisance did not come up to Egyptian standards of courtesy, for a suppressed titter broke audibly from the ranks of bronze-skinned waiting-women. But the king graciously smiled at my attempt, and turning to the nearest nobleman observed in a voice of great sweetness and self-contained majesty: 'This stranger, Ombos, is certainly a very curious person. His appearance does not at all resemble that of an Ethiopian or other savage, nor does he look like the pale-faced sailors who come to us from the Achaian land beyond the sea. His features, to be sure, are not very different from theirs; but his extraordinary and singularly inartistic dress shows him to belong to some other barbaric race.'

I glanced down at my waistcoat, and saw that I was wearing my

tourist's check suit, of grey and mud colour, with which a Bond Street tailor had supplied me just before leaving town, as the latest thing out in fancy tweeds. Evidently these Egyptians must have a very curious standard of taste not to admire our pretty and graceful style of male attire.

'If the dust beneath Your Majesty's feet may venture upon a suggestion,' put in the officer whom the king had addressed, 'I would hint that this young man is probably a stray visitor from the utterly uncivilised lands of the North. The headgear which he carries in his hand obviously betrays an Arctic habitat.'

I had instinctively taken off my round felt hat in the first moment of surprise, when I found myself in the midst of this strange throng, and I was standing now in a somewhat embarrassed posture, holding it awkwardly before me like a shield to protect my chest.

'Let the stranger cover himself,' said the king.

'Barbarian intruder, cover yourself,' cried the herald. I noticed throughout that the king never directly addressed anybody save the higher officials around him.

I put on my hat as desired. 'A most uncomfortable and silly form of tiara indeed,' said the great Thothmes.

'Very unlike your noble and awe-inspiring mitre, Lion of Egypt,' answered Ombos.

'Ask the stranger his name,' the king continued.

It was useless to offer another card, so I mentioned it in a clear voice.

'An uncouth and almost unpronounceable designation truly,' commented his Majesty to the Grand Chamberlain beside him. 'These savages speak strange languages, widely different from the flowing tongue of Memnon and Sesostris.'

The chamberlain bowed his assent with three low genuflexions. I began to feel a little abashed at these personal remarks, and I *almost* think (though I shouldn't like it to be mentioned in the Temple) that a blush rose to my cheek.

The beautiful princess, who had been standing near me meanwhile in an attitude of statuesque repose, now appeared anxious to change the current of the conversation. 'Dear father,' she said with a respectful inclination, 'surely the stranger, barbarian though he be, cannot relish such pointed allusions to his person and costume. We must let him feel the grace and delicacy of Egyptian refinement. Then he may perhaps carry back with him some faint echo of its cultured beauty to his northern wilds.'

'Nonsense, Hatasou,' replied Thothmes XXVII. testily. 'Savages have no feelings, and they are as incapable of appreciat-

ing Egyptian sensibility as the chattering crow is incapable of attaining the dignified reserve of the sacred crocodile.'

'Your Majesty is mistaken,' I said, recovering my self-possession gradually and realising my position as a free-born Englishman before the court of a foreign despot—though I must allow that I felt rather less confident than usual, owing to the fact that we were not represented in the Pyramid by a British Consul—'I am an English tourist, a visitor from a modern land whose civilisation far surpasses the rude culture of early Egypt; and I am accustomed to respectful treatment from all other nationalities, as becomes a citizen of the First Naval Power in the World.'

My answer created a profound impression. 'He has spoken to the Brother of the Sun,' cried Ombos in evident perturbation. 'He must be of the Blood Royal in his own tribe, or he would never have dared to do so!'

'Otherwise,' added a person whose dress I recognised as that of a priest, 'he must be offered up in expiation to Amon-Ra immediately.'

As a rule I am a decently truthful person, but under these alarming circumstances I ventured to tell a slight fib with an air of nonchalant boldness. 'I am a younger brother of our reigning king,' I said without a moment's hesitation; for there was nobody present to gainsay me, and I tried to salve my conscience by reflecting that at any rate I was only claiming consanguinity with an imaginary personage.

'In that case,' said King Thothmes, with more geniality in his tone, 'there can be no impropriety in my addressing you personally. Will you take a place at our table next to myself, and we can converse together without interrupting a banquet which must be brief enough in any circumstances? Hatasou, my dear, you may seat yourself next to the barbarian prince.'

I felt a visible swelling to the proper dimensions of a Royal Highness as I sat down by the king's right hand. The nobles resumed their places, the bronze-skinned waitresses left off standing like soldiers in a row and staring straight at my humble self, the goblets went round once more, and a comely maid soon brought me meat, bread, fruits, and date wine.

All this time I was naturally burning with curiosity to inquire who my strange hosts might be, and how they had preserved their existence for so many centuries in this undiscovered hall; but I was obliged to wait until I had satisfied his Majesty of my own nationality, the means by which I had entered the pyramid, the general state of affairs throughout the world at the present moment, and fifty thousand other matters of a similar sort.

Thothmes utterly refused to believe my reiterated assertion that our existing civilisation was far superior to the Egyptian ; ' because,' said he, ' I see from your dress that your nation is utterly devoid of taste or invention'; but he listened with great interest to my account of modern society, the steam-engine, the Permissive Prohibitory Bill, the telegraph, the House of Commons, Home Rule, and the other blessings of our advanced era, as well as to a brief *résumé* of European history from the rise of the Greek culture to the Russo-Turkish war. At last his questions were nearly exhausted, and I got a chance of making a few counter inquiries on my own account.

' And now,' I said, turning to the charming Hatasou, whom I thought a more pleasant informant than her august papa, ' I should like to know who *you* are.'

' What, don't you know?' she cried with unaffected surprise. ' Why, we're mummies.'

She made this astounding statement with just the same quiet unconsciousness as if she had said, ' we're French,' or ' we're Americans.' I glanced round the walls, and observed behind the columns, what I had not noticed till then—a large number of empty mummy-cases, with their lids placed carelessly by their sides.

' But what are you doing here?' I asked in a bewildered way.

' Is it possible,' said Hatasou, ' that you don't really know the object of embalming? Though your manners show you to be an agreeable and well-bred young man, you must excuse my saying that you are shockingly ignorant. We are made into mummies in order to preserve our immortality. Once in every thousand years we wake up for twenty-four hours, recover our flesh and blood, and banquet once more upon the mummied dishes and other good things laid by for us in the Pyramid. To-day is the first day of a millennium, and so we have waked up for the sixth time since we were first embalmed.'

' The *sixth* time?' I inquired incredulously. ' Then you must have been dead six thousand years.'

' Exactly so.'

' But the world has not yet existed so long,' I cried, in a fervour of orthodox horror.

' Excuse me, barbarian prince. This is the first day of the three hundred and twenty-seven thousandth millennium.'

My orthodoxy received a severe shock. However, I had been accustomed to geological calculations, and was somewhat inclined to accept the antiquity of man; so I swallowed the statement

without more ado. Besides, if such a charming girl as Hatasou had asked me at that moment to turn Mohammedan, or to worship Osiris, I believe I should incontinently have done so.

‘You wake up only for a single day and night, then?’ I said.

‘Only for a single day and night. After that, we go to sleep for another millennium.’

‘Unless you are meanwhile burned as fuel on the Cairo Railway,’ I added mentally. ‘But how,’ I continued aloud, ‘do you get these lights?’

‘The Pyramid is built above a spring of inflammable gas. We have a reservoir in one of the side chambers in which it collects during the thousand years. As soon as we awake, we turn it on at once from the tap, and light it with a lucifer match.’

‘Upon my word,’ I interposed, ‘I had no notion you Ancient Egyptians were acquainted with the use of matches.’

‘Very likely not. “There are more things in heaven and earth, Cephrenes, than are dreamt of in your philosophy,” as the bard of Philœ puts it.’

Further inquiries brought out all the secrets of that strange tomb-house, and kept me fully interested till the close of the banquet. Then the chief priest solemnly rose, offered a small fragment of meat to a deified crocodile, who sat in a meditative manner by the side of his deserted mummy-case, and declared the feast concluded for the night. All rose from their places, wandered away into the long corridors or side-aisles, and formed little groups of talkers under the brilliant gas-lamps.

For my part, I strolled off with Hatasou down the least illuminated of the colonnades, and took my seat beside a marble fountain, where several fish (gods of great sanctity, Hatasou assured me) were disporting themselves in a porphyry basin. How long we sat there I cannot tell, but I know that we talked a good deal about fish, and gods, and Egyptian habits, and Egyptian philosophy, and, above all, Egyptian love-making. The last-named subject we found very interesting, and when once we got fully started upon it, no diversion afterwards occurred to break the even tenour of the conversation. Hatasou was a lovely figure, tall, queenly, with smooth dark arms and neck of polished bronze: her big black eyes full of tenderness, and her long hair bound up into a bright Egyptian headdress, that harmonised to a tone with her complexion and her robe. The more we talked, the more desperately did I fall in love, and the more utterly oblivious did I become of my duty to Editha Fitz-Simkins. The mere ugly daughter of a rich and vulgar brand-new knight, forsooth, to show

off her airs before me, when here was a Princess of the Blood Royal of Egypt, obviously sensible to the attentions which I was paying her, and not unwilling to receive them with a coy and modest grace.

Well, I went on saying pretty things to Hatasou, and Hatasou went on deprecating them in a pretty little way, as who should say, 'I don't mean what I pretend to mean one bit'; until at last I may confess that we were both evidently as far gone in the disease of the heart called love as it is possible for two young people on first acquaintance to become. Therefore, when Hatasou pulled forth her watch—another piece of mechanism with which antiquaries used never to credit the Egyptian people—and declared that she had only three hours more to live, at least for the next thousand years, I fairly broke down, took out my handkerchief, and began to sob like a child of five years old.

Hatasou was deeply moved. Decorum forbade that she should console me with too much *empressement*; but she ventured to remove the handkerchief gently from my face, and suggested that there was yet one course open by which we might enjoy a little more of one another's society. 'Suppose,' she said quietly, 'you were to become a mummy. You would then wake up, as we do, every thousand years; and after you have tried it once, you will find it just as natural to sleep for a millennium as for eight hours. Of course,' she added with a slight blush, 'during the next three or four solar cycles there would be plenty of time to conclude any other arrangements you might possibly contemplate, before the occurrence of another glacial epoch.'

This mode of regarding time was certainly novel and somewhat bewildering to people who ordinarily reckon its lapse by weeks and months; and I had a vague consciousness that my relations with Editha imposed upon me a moral necessity of returning to the outer world, instead of becoming a millennial mummy. Besides, there was the awkward chance of being converted into fuel and dissipated into space before the arrival of the next waking day. But I took one look at Hatasou, whose eyes were filling in turn with sympathetic tears, and that look decided me. I flung Editha, life, and duty to the dogs, and resolved at once to become a mummy.

There was no time to be lost. Only three hours remained to us, and the process of embalming, even in the most hasty manner, would take up fully two. We rushed off to the chief priest, who had charge of the particular department in question. He at once acceded to my wishes, and briefly explained the mode in which they usually treated the corpse.

That word suddenly aroused me. 'The corpse!' I cried; 'but I am alive. You can't embalm me living.'

'We can,' replied the priest, 'under chloroform.'

'Chloroform!' I echoed, growing more and more astonished: 'I had no idea you Egyptians knew anything about it.'

'Ignorant barbarian!' he answered with a curl of the lip; 'you imagine yourself much wiser than the teachers of the world. If you were versed in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, you would know that chloroform is one of our simplest and commonest anæsthetics.'

I put myself at once under the hands of the priest. He brought out the chloroform, and placed it beneath my nostrils, as I lay on a soft couch under the central court. Hatasou held my hand in hers, and watched my breathing with an anxious eye. I saw the priest leaning over me, with a clouded phial in his hand, and I experienced a vague sensation of smelling myrrh and spikenard. Next, I lost myself for a few moments, and when I again recovered my senses in a temporary break, the priest was holding a small greenstone knife, dabbled with blood, and I felt that a gash had been made across my breast. Then they applied the chloroform once more; I felt Hatasou give my hand a gentle squeeze; the whole panorama faded finally from my view; and I went to sleep for a seemingly endless time.

When I awoke again, my first impression led me to believe that the thousand years were over, and that I had come to life once more to feast with Hatasou and Thothmes in the Pyramid of Abu Yilla. But second thoughts, combined with closer observation of the surroundings, convinced me that I was really lying in a bedroom of Shepheard's Hotel at Cairo. An hospital nurse leant over me, instead of a chief priest; and I noticed no tokens of Editha Fitz-Simkins's presence. But when I endeavoured to make inquiries upon the subject of my whereabouts, I was peremptorily informed that I mustn't speak, as I was only just recovering from a severe fever, and might endanger my life by talking.

Some weeks later I learned the sequel of my night's adventure. The Fitz-Simkinses, missing me from the boat in the morning, at first imagined that I might have gone ashore for an early stroll. But after breakfast time, lunch time, and dinner time had gone past, they began to grow alarmed, and sent to look for me in all directions. One of their scouts, happening to pass the Pyramid, noticed that one of the stones near the north-east angle had been displaced, so as to give access to a dark passage, hitherto unknown. Calling several of his friends, for he was afraid to venture in alone, he passed down the corridor, and through a second gateway into the

central hall. There the Fellahin found me, lying on the ground, bleeding profusely from a wound on the breast, and in an advanced stage of malarious fever. They brought me back to the boat, and the Fitz-Simkinses conveyed me at once to Cairo, for medical attendance and proper nursing.

Editha was at first convinced that I had attempted to commit suicide because I could not endure having caused her pain, and she accordingly resolved to tend me with the utmost care through my illness. But she found that my delirious remarks, besides bearing frequent reference to a princess, with whom I appeared to have been on unexpectedly intimate terms, also related very largely to our *casus belli* itself, the dancing girls of Abu Yilla. Even this trial she might have borne, setting down the moral degeneracy which led me to patronise so degrading an exhibition as a first symptom of my approaching malady: but certain unfortunate observations, containing pointed and by no means flattering allusions to her personal appearance—which I contrasted, much to her disadvantage, with that of the unknown princess—these, I say, were things which she could not forgive; and she left Cairo abruptly with her parents for the Riviera, leaving behind a stinging note, in which she denounced my perfidy and empty-heartedness with all the flowers of feminine eloquence. From that day to this I have never seen her.

When I returned to London and proposed to lay this account before the Society of Antiquaries, all my friends dissuaded me on the ground of its apparent incredibility. They declare that I must have gone to the Pyramid already in a state of delirium, discovered the entrance by accident, and sunk exhausted when I reached the inner chamber. In answer, I would point out three facts. In the first place, I undoubtedly found my way into the unknown passage—for which achievement I afterwards received the gold medal of the Société Khédiviale, and of which I retain a clear recollection, differing in no way from my recollection of the subsequent events. In the second place, I had in my pocket, when found, a ring of Hatasou's, which I drew from her finger just before I took the chloroform, and put into my pocket as a keepsake. And in the third place, I had on my breast the wound which I saw the priest inflict with a knife of greenstone, and the scar may be seen on the spot to the present day. The absurd hypothesis of my medical friends, that I was wounded by falling against a sharp edge of rock, I must at once reject as unworthy a moment's consideration.

My own theory is either that the priest had not time to complete the operation, or else that the arrival of the Fitz-Simkins'

scouts frightened back the mummies to their cases an hour or so too soon. At any rate, there they all were, ranged around the walls undisturbed, the moment the Fellahin entered.

Unfortunately, the truth of my account cannot be tested for another thousand years. But as a copy of this *BELGRAVIA ANNUAL* will be preserved for the benefit of posterity in the British Museum, I hereby solemnly call upon Collective Humanity to try the veracity of this history by sending a deputation of archæologists to the Pyramid of Abu Yilla, on the last day of December, Two thousand eight hundred and seventy-seven. If they do not then find Thothmes and Hatasou feasting in the central hall exactly as I have described, I shall willingly admit that the story of my New Year's Eve among the Mummies is a vain hallucination, unworthy of credence at the hands of the scientific world.

## A Night in a Dissecting-Room.

It is a good many years now since I was a student at the hospital of SS. Cosmas and Damian: my looking-glass tells me that in a most unpleasant way in the morning, by revealing sundry patches of white about the temples! Ah, well, it was a gay time, frivolous perhaps, but we worked as hard as we played, which is saying a good deal; and though there may have been a good deal of folly in our lives, I don't think there was much sin. Shall I ever forget that bright, sunny morning when Jack Francis, Tom Witherington, and I turned out, after a more or less reprehensible night of talk and grog, to take an early stroll, and found the lamp-lighter's ladder against the wall, and dropped it gently over the church railings, to astonish him when he came to look for it? Or that deplorable night—a Derby night—in Charlie Hull's chambers, when it was found at the last moment that the prize bull-terrier had been enjoying the cold leg of mutton which was to have been the *pièce de résistance* at supper; and when, *vingt-et-un* being proposed, our host professed his entire ignorance of the game, and proved an English counterpart of the 'heathen Chinees,' since all his guests left penniless! But these are mere maunderings, such as befit an old man. Let us come to the point. What I meant to say was that, old and grey as I am, there is one episode in that early hospital life which dwells with me yet; there are nights when, the liver being probably in a deranged state, I wake shuddering and perspiring from a dream of the horror which for some few moments went near to unsettle my reason when I was a strong young man. You may care to hear what that horror was.

First I must premise that I was no weak, emasculated dreamer, such as might easily be moved to terror; on the contrary, I was a singularly robust fellow, about one-and-twenty, with broad shoulders, fair brown hair, and a ruddy face which spoke the sanguine temperament that abides with me even now. True, I was nervous, but only in the right sense of the word. Folk, as a general rule, being, as Mr. Carlyle has happily remarked, 'mostly fools,' seem to think, if you say that a man is 'nervous,' that you mean he is a coward! Whereas, you only mean that he is a man of exceptionally delicate organisation, and of extreme susceptibility, upon whom natural causes will operate more strongly than they would do upon one of a phlegmatic temperament. If I were in a sudden danger or difficulty, physical or moral, give me a nervous

man for my friend ; the chances are that he will rise to the occasion, his whole system being braced by the sudden call on the vital energies. But this is another digression. Forgive the vagaries of a worn-out man ! I was a younger son, and had little to look to beyond the result of my own labours for advancing myself in the world. They said I had been a dreamy, old-fashioned child, and an idle boy ; the fact is, that in those early years I had been steadily gathering knowledge by dint of secret reading and even writing. When they laughed at me, and called me nicknames as a child, I could take refuge in the thought of the childish verses which lurked in my trouser-pocket, together with a few marbles, a hank of string, a lump of cobbler's wax, and such like treasures, or in the 'Mort d'Arthur,' which was to be read presently up in the medlar-tree. And when at school that dear old master, whom I understand now, tried to make me love Livy, there were still my beloved Ovid and Horace for my own private study ; and when I could fight my own battles, there was the brave, strong chum, with his wild Highland blood and his dark eyes, to cheer me on, and hearten me with praise and kindly laughter. So time went on ; and I became a man, they said, and it behoved me to make my own living ; they said, too, that I must be a doctor as my father was before me ; so I came to be a student at the hospital of SS. Cosmas and Damian.

When I once buckled to the work, I had the pride which made me determine that it should be no fault of mine if any man out-did me ; the son of Malcolm with the Big Head must not be beaten by any Sassenach, and my grand old father had held that descent before my eyes, even in the days of our greatest decadence. So I went in heart and soul for my future profession, and little by little gained a great love for it. Of course the Church would have been the nobler career, and for a youth of my temperament possibly the fitter ; but failing the ministering to minds diseased, what higher calling could there be than the healing of those bodies which so greatly influence them ? Thus, at least, I thought ; and it may have been partly this fancy which caused me to turn my attention chiefly to the study of anatomy. There seemed to me something awful and beautiful in the structure of our bodily frame, an undefinable mystery which asked an expositor ; and in that generous youthful ardour which comes to all true men at some period of their young life, I set myself to master the complexities of the human body. It is needless to tell my readers what sensations of terror and loathing had to be overcome, what suggestions of sentiment called for repression, or how the natural man shrank from some of the ghastly details of a *post-mortem*. I

had my way to make in the world, and beyond all this there was a great, alas! an unfulfilled hope before me, viz. that of making a name in my profession. So I persevered. The ruling man at the hospital in those days was old Professor P——; he was not a general favourite, but, for some reason or other, took a fancy to me, would send for me when any delicate operation was toward, ask me to execute small commissions for him, and otherwise show his liking for the silent young student; for this was in the first days of my hospital career, before I aspired to such elevated amusements as ladder-stealing and *vingt-et-un*. So at last I confided to him, not without much trembling of the voice, my desire to pursue my studies when other students were not present, and in a burst of shy confidence asked him to let me go on dissecting at night—he only kept the pass-key of the dissecting-room, and could forward my plans. Judge my delight when he assented at once, with a patronising pat of his skinny hand upon my shoulder, and an approving smile fit to freeze the very marrow of your bones. Professor P—— was ugly at any time, but when he smiled he was something awful to behold. However, I had gained my point, and on the very same evening set to work to begin my anatomical studies in private.

Dissecting-rooms now are not what they were in my young days; you might almost take a lady into them now, and, save for the unseemly exhibition of ‘a slovenly, unhandsome corse’ or so, there would be little or nothing to offend her sensibilities. But fifty years ago it was a different matter. Body-snatching was still recognised as a desirable, if slightly illegitimate, branch of trade; and when the bodies were procured they were treated in an unceremonious fashion which would greatly shock modern ideas of propriety. The dissecting-room at SS. Cosmas and Damian was situated on one side of a rather dreary quadrangle; it was a long low chamber, the upper end of which was rather wider than the rest of the apartment, and contained at its west side the only door of ingress, the room itself running north and south. In this more extended space were placed certain trestles supporting boards, upon which were deposited such bodies as were newly brought in to aid the pursuit of science. At the south end was the general operating table. When I first entered this chamber of horrors, I became aware that there had been newly deposited therein five new ‘subjects,’ but as my own experiments involved the manipulation of one formerly provided, I paid but little attention to their grisly presence.

My task began, and for some time was pursued with ever-increasing interest; but in a moment of pause there came a strange

sound, as if somebody had gently pushed at a creaking door. In the intense stillness which prevailed there was something startling about that noise which made me turn round suddenly, as if there were somebody else in the room. Of course there was not; I had the only pass-key, and so knew that the momentary panic was unreasonable, laughed at myself, and fell to my work again. How long I had been dissecting I cannot say, when again that queer creak startled me, and this time it seemed to come definitely from the north end of the room, where lay the five new bodies, so that I almost involuntarily turned my eyes in that direction. Horror of horrors! As I looked, the second of the dead men began slowly to rise: from a recumbent position he gradually assumed a sitting one, and at last stood upright! The light of my lamp in that long room showed me nothing but that terrible white figure. I could see the being's arms swaying with the exertion of rising, and the general outline of the horrible thing that was bringing the cold sweat in great beads to my brow—nothing more. It would have been almost a comfort if the eyes of the corpse had been visible, for then it would have seemed to assume some personality, and I might have addressed it, and so, by the sound of my own voice, have dispelled half the terror. But there it stood—vague, white, motionless; a thing to fear and flee. Flight was naturally my first instinct, but a moment's reflection showed how impossible such a course must be. I had locked the door on entering, as directed by Professor P—— when he gave his permission for my nocturnal studies; the key was in my pocket certainly, but to reach the door—ah! I must pass before that ghastly white figure—and if it should clutch me before the outer air were gained! All the stories of ghouls and vampires that had horrified my boyish mind in days gone by rose up to my remembrance in that awful moment, as if they were things of reality. It cannot be true that people's hair turns white in a single night, or I am sure mine would have done honour to a patriarch next morning.

I said I was of a nervous temperament, consequently a rush of despairing energy came over me. I took my lamp and ran rather than walked up to the figure that so appalled me. No motion—stiff, rigid contraction of all the limbs; no animation as I drew nearer and nearer—yes, it was really only a dead corpse, and in the frenzy of my terror I had courage to touch it. Whereby at once the whole mystery became plain. There had been five bodies brought into the dissecting-room that afternoon, but there were only four boards upon which to dispose them; so, for convenience, or to save themselves the trouble of fetching another support, the porters had so arranged their burden that one corpse

lay partly upon one board and partly upon another. As time wore on, the superincumbent weight had caused the sustaining matter to slip, which produced the first sound that startled me; this was followed by a further parting of the supports, which made a second noise. Then the feet of the corpse falling to the ground acted as a lever to the remainder of the stiffened body, which gradually assumed the position which had so unmanned me, being prevented from falling by the hips which rested upon the two boards.

I replaced the dead man in his former position, to avoid any suspicion of 'skylarking' on my part, and then opened the door, double-locked it, and fled to my own rooms. Next day I told Professor P—— what my experiences had been of a dissecting-room at midnight; he smiled a petrifying smile of incredulity, suggested pork-chops, nightmare, an over-excited imagination, and so forth. So I begged him to go privately in with me, and then showed him how the apparent resuscitation occurred; upon which he said 'My certie!' which was a good deal, coming as it did from that most unimpressionable of men. But do you know, I did not seem to care about midnight dissections for some time after that: I had such a scare from that first night in a dissecting-room.

B. MONTGOMERIE RANKING.

## Pausodpne :

### *A GREAT CHEMICAL DISCOVERY.*

WALKING along the Strand one evening last year towards Pall Mall, I was accosted near Charing Cross Station by a strange-looking, middle-aged man in a poor suit of clothes, who surprised and startled me by asking if I could tell him from what inn the coach usually started for York.

‘Dear me!’ I said, a little puzzled. ‘I didn’t know there was a coach to York. Indeed, I’m almost certain there isn’t one.’

The man looked puzzled and surprised in turn. ‘No coach to York?’ he muttered to himself, half inarticulately. ‘No coach to York? How things have changed! I wonder whether nobody ever goes to York nowadays!’

‘Pardon me,’ I said, anxious to discover what could be his meaning; ‘many people go to York every day, but of course they go by rail.’

‘Ah, yes,’ he answered softly, ‘I see. Yes, of course, they go by rail. They go by rail, no doubt. How very stupid of me!’ And he turned on his heel as if to get away from me as quickly as possible.

I can’t exactly say why, but I felt instinctively that this curious stranger was trying to conceal from me his ignorance of what a railway really was. I was quite certain from the way in which he spoke that he had not the slightest conception what I meant, and that he was doing his best to hide his confusion by pretending to understand me. Here was indeed a strange mystery. In the latter end of this nineteenth century, in the metropolis of industrial England, within a stone’s-throw of Charing Cross terminus, I had met an adult Englishman who apparently did not know of the existence of railways. My curiosity was too much piqued to let the matter rest there. I must find out what he meant by it. I walked after him hastily, as he tried to disappear among the crowd, and laid my hand upon his shoulder, to his evident chagrin.

‘Excuse me,’ I said, drawing him aside down the corner of Craven Street; ‘you did not understand what I meant when I said people went to York by rail?’

He looked in my face steadily, and then, instead of replying to my remark, he said slowly, ‘Your name is Spottiswood, I believe?’

Again I gave a start of surprise. ‘It is,’ I answered; ‘but I never remember to have seen you before.’

‘No,’ he replied dreamily; ‘no, we have never met till now, no doubt; but I knew your father, I’m sure; or perhaps it may have been your grandfather.’

‘Not my grandfather, certainly,’ said I, ‘for he was killed at Waterloo.’

‘At Waterloo! Indeed! How long since, pray?’

I could not refrain from laughing outright. ‘Why, of course,’ I answered, ‘in 1815. There has been nothing particular to kill off any large number of Englishmen at Waterloo since the year of the battle, I suppose.’

‘True,’ he muttered, ‘quite true; so I should have fancied.’ But I saw again from the cloud of doubt and bewilderment which came over his intelligent face that the name of Waterloo conveyed no idea whatsoever to his mind.

Never in my life had I felt so utterly confused and astonished. In spite of his poor dress, I could easily see from the clear-cut face and the refined accent of my strange acquaintance that he was an educated gentleman—a man accustomed to mix in cultivated society. Yet he clearly knew nothing whatsoever about railways, and was ignorant of the most salient facts in English history. Had I suddenly come across some Caspar Hauser, immured for years in a private prison, and just let loose upon the world by his gaolers? or was my mysterious stranger one of the Seven Sleepers of Ephesus, turned out unexpectedly in modern costume on the streets of London? I don’t suppose there exists on earth a man more utterly free than I am from any tinge of superstition, any lingering touch of a love for the miraculous; but I confess for a moment I felt half inclined to suppose that the man before me must have drunk the elixir of life, or must have dropped suddenly upon earth from some distant planet.

The impulse to fathom this mystery was irresistible. I drew my arm through his. ‘If you knew my father,’ I said, ‘you will not object to come into my chambers and take a glass of wine with me.’

‘Thank you,’ he answered, half suspiciously; ‘thank you very much. I think you look like a man who can be trusted, and I will go with you.’

We walked along the Embankment to Adelphi Terrace, where I took him up to my rooms, and seated him in my easy-chair near the window. As he sat down, one of the trains on the Metropolitan line whirred past the Terrace, snorting steam and whistling shrilly, after the fashion of Metropolitan engines generally. My mysterious stranger jumped back in alarm, and seemed to be afraid of some immediate catastrophe. There was absolutely no possibility

of doubting it. The man had obviously never seen a locomotive before.

‘Evidently,’ I said, ‘you do not know London. I suppose you are a colonist from some remote district, perhaps an Australian from the interior somewhere, just landed at the Tower?’

‘No, not an Austrian’—I noted his misapprehension—‘but a Londoner born and bred.’

‘How is it, then, that you seem never to have seen an engine before?’

‘Can I trust you?’ he asked in a piteously plaintive, half-terrified tone. ‘If I tell you all about it, will you at least not aid in persecuting and imprisoning me?’

I was touched by his evident grief and terror. ‘No,’ I answered, ‘you may trust me implicitly. I feel sure there is something in your history which entitles you to sympathy and protection.’

‘Well,’ he replied, grasping my hand warmly, ‘I will tell you all my story; but you must be prepared for something almost too startling to be credible.’

‘My name is Jonathan Spottiswood,’ he began calmly.

Again I experienced a marvellous start: Jonathan Spottiswood was the name of my great-great-uncle, whose unaccountable disappearance from London just a century since had involved our family in so much protracted litigation as to the succession to his property. In fact, it was Jonathan Spottiswood’s money which at that moment formed the bulk of my little fortune. But I would not interrupt him, so great was my anxiety to hear the story of his life.

‘I was born in London,’ he went on, ‘in 1750. If you can hear me say that and yet believe that possibly I am not a madman, I will tell you the rest of my tale; if not, I shall go at once and for ever.’

‘I suspend judgment for the present,’ I answered. ‘What you say is extraordinary, but not more extraordinary perhaps than the clear anachronism of your ignorance about locomotives in the midst of the present century.’

‘So be it, then. Well, I will tell you the facts briefly in as few words as I can. I was always much given to experimental philosophy, and I spent most of my time in the little laboratory which I had built for myself behind my father’s house in the Strand. I had a small independent fortune of my own, left me by an uncle who had made many successful ventures in the China trade; and as I was indisposed to follow my father’s profession of solicitor, I gave myself up almost entirely to the pursuit of natural philosophy, following the researches of the great Mr. Cavendish,

our chief English thinker in this kind, as well as of Monsieur Lavoisier, the ingenious French chemist, and of my friend Dr. Priestley, the Birmingham philosopher, whose new theory of phlogiston I have been much concerned to consider and to promulgate. But the especial subject to which I devoted myself was the elucidation of the nature of fixed air. I do not know how far you yourself may happen to have heard respecting these late discoveries in chemical science, but I dare venture to say that you are at least acquainted with the nature of the body to which I refer.'

'Perfectly,' I answered with a smile, 'though your terminology is now a little out of date. Fixed air was, I believe, the old-fashioned name for carbonic acid gas.'

'Ah,' he cried vehemently, 'that accursed word again! Carbonic acid has undone me, clearly. Yes, if you will have it so, that seems to be what they call it in this extraordinary century; but fixed air was the name we used to give it in our time, and fixed air is what I must call it, of course, in telling you my story. Well, I was deeply interested in this curious question, and also in some of the results which I obtained from working with fixed air in combination with a substance I had produced from the essential oil of a weed known to us in England as lady's mantle, but which the learned Mr. Carl Linnæus describes in his system as *Alchemilla vulgaris*. From that weed I obtained an oil which I combined with a certain decoction of fixed air into a remarkable compound; and to this compound, from its singular properties, I proposed to give the name of Pausodyne. For some years I was almost wholly engaged in investigating the conduct of this remarkable agent; and lest I should weary you by entering into too much detail, I may as well say at once that it possessed the singular power of entirely suspending animation in men or animals for several hours together. It is a highly volatile oil, like ammonia in smell, but much thicker in gravity; and when held to the nose of an animal, it causes immediate stoppage of the heart's action, making the body seem quite dead for long periods at a time. But the moment a mixture of the pausodyne with oil of vitriol and gum resin is presented to the nostrils, the animal instantaneously revives exactly as before, showing no evil effects whatsoever from its temporary simulation of death. To the reviving mixture I have given the appropriate name of Anegeiric.

'Of course you will instantly see the valuable medical applications which may be made of such an agent. I used it at first for experimenting upon the amputation of limbs and other surgical operations. It succeeded admirably. I found that a dog under

the influence of pausodyne suffered his leg, which had been broken in a street accident, to be set and spliced without the slightest symptom of feeling or discomfort. A cat, shot with a pistol by a cruel boy, had the bullet extracted without moving a muscle. My assistant, having allowed his little finger to mortify from neglect of a burn, permitted me to try the effect of my discovery upon himself; and I removed the injured joints while he remained in a state of complete insensibility, so that he could hardly believe afterwards in the actual truth of their removal. I felt certain that I had invented a medical process of the very highest and greatest utility.

‘All this took place in or before the year 1781. How long ago that may be according to your modern reckoning I cannot say; but to me it seems hardly more than a few months since. Perhaps you would not mind telling me the date of the current year. I have never been able to ascertain it.’

‘This is 1881,’ I said, growing every moment more interested in his tale.

‘Thank you. I gathered that we must now be somewhere near the close of the nineteenth century, though I could not learn the exact date with certainty. Well, I should tell you, my dear sir, that I had contracted an engagement about the year 1779 with a young lady of most remarkable beauty and attractive mental gifts, a Miss Amelia Spragg, daughter of the well-known General Sir Thomas Spragg, with whose achievements you are doubtless familiar. Pardon me, my friend of another age, pardon me, I beg of you, if I cannot allude to this subject without emotion after a lapse of time which to you doubtless seems like a century, but is to me a matter of some few months only at the utmost. I feel towards her as towards one whom I have but recently lost, though I now find that she has been dead for more than eighty years.’ As he spoke, the tears came into his eyes profusely; and I could see that under the external calmness and quaintness of his eighteenth century language and demeanour his whole nature was profoundly stirred at the thought of his lost love.

‘Look here,’ he continued, taking from his breast a large old-fashioned gold locket containing a miniature; ‘that is her portrait, by Mr. Walker, and a very truthful likeness indeed. They left me that when they took away my clothes at the Asylum, for I would not consent to part with it, and the physician in attendance observed that to deprive me of it might only increase the frequency and violence of my paroxysms. For I will not conceal from you the fact that I have just escaped from a pauper lunatic establishment.’

I took the miniature which he handed me, and looked at it closely. It was the picture of a young and beautiful girl, with the features and costume of a Sir Joshua. I recognised the face at once as that of a lady whose portrait by Gainsborough hangs on the walls of my uncle's dining-room at Whittingham Abbey. It was strange indeed to hear a living man speak of himself as the former lover of this, to me, historic personage.

'Sir Thomas, however,' he went on, 'was much opposed to our union, on the ground of some real or fancied social disparity in our positions; but I at last obtained his conditional consent, if only I could succeed in obtaining the Fellowship of the Royal Society, which might, he thought, be accepted as a passport into that fashionable circle of which he was a member. Spurred on by this ambition, and by the encouragement of my Amelia, I worked day and night at the perfectioning of my great discovery, which I was assured would bring not only honour and dignity to myself, but also the alleviation and assuagement of pain to countless thousands of my fellow-creatures. I concealed the nature of my experiments, however, lest any rival investigator should enter the field with me prematurely, and share the credit to which I alone was really entitled. For some months I was successful in my efforts at concealment; but in March of this year—I mistake; of the year 1781, I should say—an unfortunate circumstance caused me to take special and exceptional precautions against intrusion.

'I was then conducting my experiments upon living animals, and especially upon the extirpation of certain painful internal diseases to which they are subject. I had a number of suffering cats in my laboratory, which I had treated with pausodyne, and stretched out on boards for the purpose of removing the tumours with which they were afflicted. I had no doubt that in this manner, while directly benefiting the animal creation, I should indirectly obtain the necessary skill to operate successfully upon human beings in similar circumstances. Already I had completely cured several cats without any pain whatsoever, and I was anxious to proceed to the human subject. Walking one morning in the Strand, I found a beggar woman outside a gin-shop, quite drunk, with a small ill-clad child by her side, suffering the most excruciating torments from a perfect remediable cause. I induced the mother to accompany me to my laboratory, and there I treated the poor little creature with pausodyne, and began to operate upon her with perfect confidence of success.

'Unhappily, my laboratory had excited the suspicion of many ill-disposed persons among the low mob of the neighbourhood. It was whispered abroad that I was what they called a vivisectionist;

and these people, who would willingly have attended a bull-baiting or a prize fight, found themselves of a sudden wondrous humane when scientific procedure was under consideration. Besides, I had made myself unpopular by receiving visits from my friend Dr. Priestley, whose religious opinions were not satisfactory to the strict orthodoxy of St. Giles's. I was rumoured to be a philosopher, a torturer of live animals, and an atheist. Whether the former accusation were true or not, let others decide; the two latter, heaven be my witness, were wholly unfounded. However, when the neighbouring rabble saw a drunken woman with a little girl entering my door, a report got abroad at once that I was going to vivisect a Christian child. The mob soon collected in force, and broke into the laboratory. At that moment I was engaged, with my assistant, in operating upon the girl, while several cats, all completely anæstheticised, were bound down on the boards around, awaiting the healing of their wounds after the removal of tumours. At the sight of such apparent tortures the people grew wild with rage, and happening in their transports to fling down a large bottle of the anegeiric, or reviving mixture, the child and the animals all at once recovered consciousness, and began of course to writhe and scream with acute pain. I need not describe to you the scene that ensued. My laboratory was wrecked, my assistant severely injured, and I myself barely escaped with my life.

‘After this *contretemps* I determined to be more cautious. I took the lease of a new house at Hampstead, and in the garden I determined to build myself a subterranean laboratory where I might be absolutely free from intrusion. I hired some labourers from Bath for this purpose, and I explained to them the nature of my wishes, and the absolute necessity of secrecy. A high wall surrounded the garden, and here the workmen worked securely and unseen. I concealed my design even from my dear brother—whose grandson or great-grandson I suppose you must be—and when the building was finished, I sent my men back to Bath, with strict injunctions never to mention the matter to anyone. A trap-door in the cellar, artfully concealed, gave access to the passage; a large oak portal, bound with iron, shut me securely in; and my air supply was obtained by means of pipes communicating through blank spaces in the brick wall of the garden with the outer atmosphere. Every arrangement for concealment was perfect; and I resolved in future, till my results were perfectly established, that I would dispense with the aid of an assistant.

‘I was in high spirits when I went to visit my Amelia that evening, and I told her confidently that before the end of the year I expected to gain the gold medal of the Royal Society. The

dear girl was pleased at my glowing prospects, and gave me every assurance of the delight with which she hailed the probability of our approaching union.

‘Next day I began my experiments afresh in my new quarters. I bolted myself into the laboratory, and set to work with renewed vigour. I was experimenting upon an injured dog, and I placed a large bottle of pausodyne beside me as I administered the drug to his nostrils. The rising fumes seemed to affect my head more than usual in that confined space, and I tottered a little as I worked. My arm grew weaker, and at last fell powerless to my side. As it fell it knocked down the large bottle of pausodyne, and I saw the liquid spreading over the floor. That was almost the last thing that I knew. I staggered toward the door, but did not reach it; and then I remember nothing more for a considerable period.’

He wiped his forehead with his sleeve—he had no handkerchief—and then proceeded.

‘When I woke up again the effects of the pausodyne had worn themselves out, and I felt that I must have remained unconscious for at least a week or a fortnight. My candle had gone out, and I could not find my tinder-box. I rose up slowly and with difficulty, for the air of the room was close and filled with fumes, and made my way in the dark towards the door. To my surprise, the bolt was so stiff with rust that it would hardly move. I opened it after a struggle, and found myself in the passage. Groping my way towards the trap-door of the cellar, I felt it was obstructed by some heavy body. With an immense effort, for my strength seemed but feeble, I pushed it up, and discovered that a heap of sea-coals lay on top of it. I extricated myself into the cellar, and there a fresh surprise awaited me. A new entrance had been made into the front, so that I walked out at once upon the open road, instead of up the stairs into the kitchen. Looking up at the exterior of my house, my brain reeled with bewilderment when I saw that it had disappeared almost entirely, and that a different porch and wholly unfamiliar windows occupied its façade. I must have slept far longer than I at first imagined—perhaps a whole year or more. A vague terror prevented me from walking up the steps of my own home. Possibly my brother, thinking me dead, might have sold the lease; possibly some stranger might resent my intrusion into the house that was now his own. At any rate, I thought it safer to walk into the road. I would go towards London, to my brother’s house in St. Mary le Bone. I turned into the Hampstead Road, and directed my steps thitherward.

‘Again, another surprise began to affect me with a horrible and ill-defined sense of awe. Not a single object that I saw was really familiar to me. I recognised that I was in the Hampstead Road, but it was not the Hampstead Road which I used to know before my fatal experiments. The houses were far more numerous, the trees were bigger and older. A year, nay, even a few years would not have sufficed for such a change. I began to fear that I had slept away a whole decade.

‘It was early morning, and few people were yet abroad. But the costume of those whom I met seemed strange and fantastic to me. Moreover, I noticed that they all turned and looked after me with evident surprise, as though my dress caused them quite as much astonishment as theirs caused me. I was quietly attired in my snuff-coloured suit of small-clothes, with silk stockings and simple buckle shoes, and I had of course no hat; but I gathered that my appearance caused universal amazement and concern, far more than could be justified by the mere accidental absence of head-gear. A dread began to oppress me that I might actually have slept out my whole age and generation. Was my Amelia alive? and if so, would she be still the same Amelia I had known a week or two before? Should I find her an aged woman, still cherishing a reminiscence of her former love; or might she herself perhaps be dead and forgotten, while I remained, alone and solitary, in a world which knew me not?

‘I walked along unmolested, but with reeling brain, through streets more and more unfamiliar, till I came near the St. Mary le Bone Road. There, as I hesitated a little and staggered at the crossing, a man in a curious suit of dark blue clothes, with a grotesque felt helmet on his head, whom I afterwards found to be a constable, came up and touched me on the shoulder.

‘“Look here,” he said to me in a rough voice, “what are you a-doin’ in this ’ere fancy-dress at this hour in the mornin’? You’ve lost your way home, I take it.”

‘“I was going,” I answered, “to the St. Mary le Bone Road.”

‘“Why, you image,” says he rudely, “if you mean Marribon, why don’t you say Marribon? What house are you a-lookin’ for, eh?”

‘“My brother lives,” I replied, “at the ‘Lamb,’ near St. Mary’s Church, and I was going to his residence.”

‘“The ‘Lamb!’” says he, with a rude laugh; “there ain’t no public of that name in the road. It’s my belief,” he goes on after a moment, “that you’re drunk, or mad, or else you’ve stole them clothes. Any way, you’ve got to go along with me to the station, so walk it, will you.”

“Pardon me,” I said, “I suppose you are an officer of the law, and I would not attempt to resist your authority”—“You’d better not,” says he, half to himself—“but I should like to go to my brother’s house, where I could show you that I am a respectable person.”

“Well,” says my fellow, insolently, “I’ll go along of you if you like, and if it’s all right, I suppose you won’t mind standing a bob.”

“A what?” said I.

“A bob,” says he, laughing; “a shillin’, you know.”

‘To get rid of his insolence for a while, I pulled out my purse and handed him a shilling. It was a George II. with milled edges, not like the things I see you use now. He held it up and looked at it, and then he said again, “Look here, you know, this isn’t good. You’d better come along with me straight to the station, and not make a fuss about it. There’s three charges against you, that’s all. One is, that you’re drunk. The second is, that you’re mad. And the third is, that you’ve been trying to utter false coin. Any one of ’em’s quite enough to justify me in takin’ you into custody.”

‘I saw it was no use to resist, and I went along with him.

‘I won’t trouble you with the whole of the details, but the upshot of it all was, they took me before a magistrate. By this time I had begun to realise the full terror of the situation, and I saw clearly that the real danger lay in the inevitable suspicion of madness under which I must labour. When I got into the court I told the magistrate my story very shortly and simply, as I have told it to you now. He listened to me without a word, and at the end he turned round to his clerk and said, “This is clearly a case for Dr. Fitz-Jenkins, I think.”

“Sir,” I said, “before you send me to a madhouse, which I suppose is what you mean by these words, I trust you will at least examine the evidences of my story. Look at my clothing, look at these coins, look at everything about me.” And I handed him my purse to see for himself.

‘He looked at it for a minute, and then he turned towards me very sternly. “Mr. Spottiswood,” he said, “or whatever else your real name may be, if this is a joke, it is a very foolish and unbecoming one. Your dress is no doubt very well designed; your small collection of coins is interesting and well-selected; and you have got up your character remarkably well. If you are really sane, which I suspect to be the case, then your studied attempt to waste the time of this court and to make a laughing-stock of its magistrate will meet with the punishment it deserves.

I shall remit your case for consideration to our medical officer. If you consent to give him your real name and address, you will be liberated after his examination. Otherwise, it will be necessary to satisfy ourselves as to your identity. Not a word more, sir," he continued, as I tried to speak on behalf of my story. "Inspector, remove the prisoner."

'They took me away, and the surgeon examined me. To cut things short, I was pronounced mad, and three days later the commissioners passed me for a pauper asylum. When I came to be examined, they said I showed no recollection of most subjects of ordinary education.

' "I am a chemist," said I; "try me with some chemical questions. You will see that I can answer sanely enough."

' "How do you mix a grey powder?" said the commissioner.

' "Excuse me," I said, "I mean a chemical philosopher, not an apothecary."

' "Oh, very well, then; what is carbonic acid?"

' "I never heard of it," I answered in despair. "It must be something which has come into use since—since I left off learning chemistry." For I had discovered that my only chance now was to avoid all reference to my past life and the extraordinary calamity which had thus unexpectedly overtaken me. "Please try me with something else."

' "Oh, certainly. What is the atomic weight of chlorine?"

' I could only answer that I did not know.

' "This is a very clear case," said the commissioner. "Evidently he is a gentleman by birth and education, but he can give no very satisfactory account of his friends, and till they come forward to claim him we can only send him for a time to North Street."

' "For heaven's sake, gentlemen," I cried, "before you consign me to an asylum, give me one more chance. I am perfectly sane; I remember all I ever knew; but you are asking me questions about subjects on which I never had any information. Ask me anything historical, and see whether I have forgotten or confused any of my facts."

' I will do the commissioner the justice to say that he seemed anxious not to decide upon the case without full consideration. "Tell me what you can recollect," he said, "as to the reign of George IV."

' "I know nothing at all about it," I answered, terror-stricken, "but oh, do pray ask me anything up to the time of George III."

' "Then please say what you think of the French Revolution."

' I was thunderstruck. I could make no reply, and the com-

missioners shortly signed the papers to send me to North Street pauper asylum. They hurried me into the street, and I walked beside my captors towards the prison to which they had consigned me. Yet I did not give up all hope even so of ultimately regaining my freedom. I thought the rationality of my demeanour and the obvious soundness of all my reasoning powers would suffice in time to satisfy the medical attendant as to my perfect sanity. I felt sure that people could never long mistake a man so clear-headed and collected as myself for a madman.

‘On our way, however, we happened to pass a churchyard where some workmen were engaged in removing a number of old tombstones from the crowded area. Even in my existing agitated condition, I could not help catching the name and date on one mouldering slab which a labourer had just placed upon the edge of the pavement. It ran something like this: “Sacred to the memory of Amelia, second daughter of the late Sir Thomas Spragg, knight, and beloved wife of Henry McAlister, Esq., by whom this stone is erected. Died May 20, 1799, aged 44 years.” Though I had gathered already that my dear girl must probably have long been dead, yet the reality of the fact had not yet had time to fix itself upon my mind. You must remember, my dear sir, that I had but awaked a few days earlier from my long slumber, and that during those days I had been harassed and agitated by such a flood of incomprehensible complications, that I could not really grasp in all its fulness the complete isolation of my present position. When I saw the tombstone of one whom, as it seemed to me, I had loved passionately but a week or two before, I could not refrain from rushing to embrace it, and covering the insensible stone with my boiling tears. “Oh, my Amelia, my Amelia,” I cried, “I shall never again behold thee, then! I shall never again press thee to my heart, or hear thy dear lips pronounce my name!”

‘But the unfeeling wretches who had charge of me were far from being moved to sympathy by my bitter grief. “Died in 1799,” said one of them with a sneer. “Why, this madman’s blubbering over the grave of an old lady who has been buried for about a hundred years!” And the workmen joined in their laughter as my gaolers tore me away to the prison where I was to spend the remainder of my days.

‘When we arrived at the asylum, the surgeon in attendance was informed of this circumstance, and the opinion that I was hopelessly mad thus became ingrained in his whole conceptions of my case. All this took place in the spring of the present year. I remained five months or more in the asylum, but I never saw any chance of creating a more favourable impression on the minds

of the authorities. Mixing as I did only with other patients, I could gain no clear ideas of what had happened since I had taken my fatal sleep; and whenever I endeavoured to question the keepers, they amused themselves by giving me evidently false and inconsistent answers, in order to enjoy my chagrin and confusion. I could not even learn the actual date of the present year, for one keeper would laugh and say it was 2001, while another would confidentially advise me to date my petition to the Commissioners, "Jan. 1, A.D. one million." The surgeon, who never played me any such pranks, yet refused to aid me in any way, lest, as he said, he should strengthen me in my sad delusion. He was convinced that I must be an historical student, whose reason had broken down through too close study of the eighteenth century; and he felt certain that sooner or later my friends would come to claim me. He is a gentle and humane man, against whom I have no personal complaint to make; but his initial misconception prevented him and everybody else from ever paying the least attention to my story. I could not even induce them to make inquiries at my house at Hampstead, where the discovery of the subterranean laboratory would have partially proved the truth of my account.

'Many visitors came to the asylum from time to time, and they were always told that I possessed a minute and remarkable acquaintance with the history of the eighteenth century. They questioned me about facts which are as vivid in my memory as those of the present month, and were much surprised at the accuracy of my replies. But they only thought it strange that so clever a man should be so very mad, and that my information should be so full as to past events, while my notions about the modern world were so utterly chaotic. The surgeon, however, always believed that my reticence about all events posterior to 1781 was a part of my insanity. I had studied the early part of the eighteenth century so fully, he said, that I fancied I had lived in it; and I had persuaded myself that I knew nothing at all about the subsequent state of the world.'

The poor fellow stopped a while, and again drew his sleeve across his forehead. It was impossible to look at him and believe for a moment that he was a madman.

'And how did you make your escape from the asylum?' I asked.

'Now, this very evening,' he answered; 'I simply broke away from the door and ran down toward the Strand, till I came to a place that looked a little like St. Martin's Fields, with a great column and some fountains, and near there I met you. It seemed

to me that the best thing to do was to catch the York coach and get away from the town as soon as possible. You met me, and your look and name inspired me with confidence. I believe you must be a descendant of my dear brother.'

'I have not the slightest doubt,' I answered solemnly, 'that every word of your story is true, and that you are really my great-great-uncle. My own knowledge of our family history exactly tallies with what you tell me. I shall spare no endeavour to clear up this extraordinary matter, and to put you once more in your true position.'

'And you will protect me?' he cried fervently, clasping my hand in both his own with intense eagerness. 'You will not give me up once more to the asylum people?'

'I will do everything on earth that is possible for you,' I replied.

He lifted my hand to his lips and kissed it several times, while I felt hot tears falling upon it as he bent over me. It was a strange position, look at it how you will. Grant that I was but the dupe of a madman, yet even to believe for a moment that I, a man of well-nigh fifty, stood there in face of my own great-grandfather's brother, to all appearance some twenty years my junior, was in itself an extraordinary and marvellous thing. Both of us were too overcome to speak. It was a few minutes before we said anything, and then a loud knock at the door made my hunted stranger rise up hastily in terror from his chair.

'Gracious heavens!' he cried, 'they have tracked me hither. They are coming to fetch me. Oh, hide me, hide me, anywhere from these wretches!'

As he spoke, the door opened, and two keepers with a policeman entered my room.

'Ah, here he is!' said one of them, advancing towards the fugitive, who shrank away towards the window as he approached.

'Do not touch him,' I exclaimed, throwing myself in the way. 'Every word of what he says is true, and he is no more insane than I am.'

The keeper laughed a low laugh of vulgar incredulity. 'Why, there's a pair of you, I do believe,' he said. 'You're just as mad yourself as t'other one.' And he pushed me aside roughly to get at his charge.

But the poor fellow, seeing him come towards him, seemed suddenly to grow instinct with a terrible vigour, and hurled off the keeper with one hand, as a strong man might do with a little terrier. Then, before we could see what he was meditating, he jumped upon the ledge of the open window, shouted out loudly,

‘Farewell, farewell!’ and leapt with a spring on to the embankment beneath.

All four of us rushed hastily down the three flights of steps to the bottom, and came below upon a crushed and mangled mass on the spattered pavement. He was quite dead. Even the policeman was shocked and horrified at the dreadful way in which the body had been crushed and mutilated in its fall, and at the suddenness and unexpectedness of the tragedy. We took him up and laid him out in my room; and from that room he was interred after the inquest, with all the respect which I should have paid to an undoubted relative. On his grave in Kensal Green Cemetery I have placed a stone bearing the simple inscription, ‘Jonathan Spottiswood. Died 1881.’ The hint I had received from the keeper prevented me from saying anything as to my belief in his story, but I asked for leave to undertake the duty of his interment on the ground that he bore my own surname, and that no other person was forthcoming to assume the task. The parochial authorities were glad enough to rid the ratepayers of the expense.

At the inquest I gave my evidence simply and briefly, dwelling mainly upon the accidental nature of our meeting, and the facts as to his fatal leap. I said nothing about the known disappearance of Jonathan Spottiswood in 1781, nor the other points which gave credibility to his strange tale. But from this day forward I give myself up to proving the truth of his story, and realising the splendid chemical discovery which promises so much benefit to mankind. For the first purpose, I have offered a large reward for the discovery of a trap-door in a coal-cellar at Hampstead, leading into a subterranean passage and laboratory; since, unfortunately, my unhappy visitor did not happen to mention the position of his house. For the second purpose, I have begun a series of experiments upon the properties of the essential oil of *alchemilla*, and the possibility of successfully treating it with carbonic anhydride; since, unfortunately, he was equally vague as to the nature of his process and the proportions of either constituent. Many people will conclude at once, no doubt, that I myself have become infected with the monomania of my miserable namesake, but I am determined at any rate not to allow so extraordinary an anæsthetic to go unacknowledged, if there be even a remote chance of actually proving its useful nature. Meanwhile, I say nothing even to my dearest friends with regard to the researches upon which I am engaged.

J. ARBUTHNOT WILSON.

## Two Delicate Cases.

If you have never read my work—Dr. Dormer's masterpiece, as I am told it is termed by the profession—upon the Skin, in connection with the interesting subject of tattooing, you had better get it, because the book is becoming exceedingly rare. I may say without vanity that it is by far the best monograph on the subject that exists; for it is the only one. Others—hundreds of others—have written, of course, upon skin diseases. Indeed, the question I found myself putting to myself on commencing practice in London as an expert in that branch of the healing art, was, 'What have they *not* written about?' There are nowadays but two methods of getting one's name known and establishing a medical reputation in London: one is by taking a house in Mayfair with an immense doorplate, and setting up a brougham and pair in which you sit well forward and are driven rapidly as if you had not a moment to lose; the other is by the publication of some exhaustive treatise, with coloured plates. Most of these last, though often striking (indeed, once seen, you will never forget them), are to the unprofessional eye by no means attractive, and it was not my object to recommend myself to the profession only. Instead, therefore, of any glowing account of the nature of Carbuncles, or genial essay on Port-wine Marks, I devoted myself to the comparatively unknown but picturesque subject of Tattooing.

It was not, it must be owned, one of very general application, but it had some general interest, and if only that could be aroused and concentrated upon Nicholas Dormer, his future would be assured.

I had the honour of being the first man to introduce to the public (through the columns of the 'Medical Mercury') the case of Matthew Stevadore, the most highly coloured and artistically executed individual known to science. He had been made prisoner in Chinese Tartary and sentenced to be put to death, but his punishment had been commuted (or extended) to tattooing. Five others suffered with him, but he was the only survivor of the operation, which combined the horrors of sitting for one's portrait and vivisection. The victim was held fast by four strong men, while a fifth, the artist, worked away upon him with a split reed, like a steel pen, for hours. At the end of three months he was considered finished, and would doubtless have been 'hung upon the

line' if the Chinese Tartars had had a Royal Academy in which to exhibit him.

The pigments used are doubtful; it is certain they were not powdered charcoal, gunpowder, or cinnabar, the colours used by our native artists (chiefly marine) for the same purpose, inasmuch as 'none of the particles remained entangled in the meshes of the true skin (corium),' or 'became encapsuled' (see article in 'Medical Mercury') 'in the nearest lymphatic glands.' One must conclude that the work was performed by the simple agency of the juice of plants. Yet the effect produced was perfect. 'So it ought to be,' poor Matthew used to say with a groan of reminiscence, when complimented upon his personal appearance. Indeed, I have no doubt that the operation hurt him very much. If he had known that he was going to be a contribution to science, or even to have formed the subject of an article in the 'Mercury,' he might (perhaps) have borne up better. But as it was, those consolatory reflections were denied him. He had only the satisfaction of feeling that (if he survived) he would be the best illustrated man in Chinese Tartary.

He looked, when in nature's garb, as though the whole of his body was tightly enveloped in a robe of the richest webbing. From the crown of his head to the tips of his toes he was covered with dark blue figures of plants and animals, in the interspaces of which were written characters (testimonials, for all I know) in blue and red. The hands were tattooed on both surfaces, but only with inscriptions; probably a condensed biography of the artist himself, with a catalogue of his other works. The blue figures stopped short at the insteps, but the tattooing was continued on the feet in scarlet to the roots of the nails. Through the very hair of the scalp and beard could be seen 'designs' in blue. On the whole body there were no fewer than 388 figures: apes, cats, tigers, eagles, storks, swans, elephants, crocodiles, snakes, fish, lions, snails, and men and women; of inanimate objects such as fruits, flowers, leaves, and bows and arrows, there was also a lavish supply; and upon his forehead on each side were two panthers 'regardant'—that is, looking down with admiration (as well they might) upon this interesting and unrivalled collection.

Such were the attractions of my honest friend Matthew Stevatore, who made a good deal of money by the exhibition of them in Vienna, where I went on purpose to see him. It may certainly be said of him, if of anybody, that 'we shall never look upon his like again.' It has been remarked that 'beauty is only skin-deep,' but in his case it was at all events more lasting than usual. If it was not 'a joy for ever,' he retained it as long as he lived.

Of course I incorporated my notes in the 'Mercury' upon this case—after what had been written *upon* him, Matthew didn't care twopence what was written *about* him—in my work upon Tattooing, which also contained a full-length portrait of him in colours. It had an immense success, but, strange to say, did not increase—that is, commence—my professional practice. I published another book of a more scientific kind with the same result; that is to say, it had none. It was tolerably successful as medical works go—it cost the author not more than fifty pounds or so; but, as was remarked by the senior surgeon of our hospital, who has the misfortune to be a wag, 'it didn't beat the tattoo;' while the general public of course never so much as heard of it.

One day, however, grim Fortune relaxed into a smile which I took for good nature, though, as it turned out, it was only cynicism. A carriage and pair drove up to my door, out of which stepped an eminent personage. There is a temptation to leave that description of my visitor as it stands; but I scorn to deceive the public, and therefore hasten to add that it was *not* a member of the Royal Family. He was not at that time even a peer of the realm; but nevertheless he was a man of great importance. I knew him by sight as one of the life-governors of our hospital; and I knew him by report as being one of the greatest financiers in the city. A tall soldier-like fellow, very upright, though he bore on his own shoulders many a gigantic speculation, and with an air of command that was quite Napoleonic, as befitted the master of millions. Being so very rich, there were naturally many stories afloat concerning him, and all to his disadvantage. The same thing happens in the case of all our great men, from statesmen to poets. His mother was in the workhouse; his brother in penal servitude; he had murdered his first wife, and was starving his second. He himself—as a slight drawback to the enjoyment of his ill-gotten gains—had a disease previously unknown to the human species.

If so, I only hoped he had come to consult me about it. A surgeon's duty is to heal, not to give ear to idle rumours. Still, I could not help regarding him as he took his seat in my study with a certain curiosity. His name was Mostyn, or rather his card asserted as much; his features were Caucasian, and suggested Moses. His speech was very calm and deliberate, either the result of indifference to any change of fortune that might possibly befall him, or a precautionary measure to restrain a natural tendency to talk through his nose.

'My visit here, Dr. Dormer, is a strictly confidential one. I trust to your honour as a member of a chivalrous profession—and

I will also make it worth your while—not to reveal the nature of this application to any human being, during my lifetime.’

I gave my promise, and kept it. Mr. Mostyn—Dives Mostyn, as the world once called him—has long since been gathered to his fathers, whoever they were. He died in Paddington Workhouse.

‘In my early days,’ he went on, ‘I bore a very different character from that which I have since acquired.’ Here he stopped: he was obviously in a difficulty. I hastened to help him out of it.

‘You mean, perhaps,’ said I, smiling (as though it were of no consequence), ‘that you bore an indifferent character?’

‘Just so,’ he answered; ‘thank you. Not that I ever did anything positively discreditable.’

I waved my hand to intimate that even if it had been so (which was incredible), it would make no matter to me. This kind of ‘treatment’ in such cases (to speak professionally), I have always found to afford immense relief.

‘In youth, however,’ proceeded my visitor, ‘I was what is called a ne’er-do-well. I could not settle to anything. Finance—of which, if I may say so, I have shown myself to be a master—was a calling not at that time open to me. I never had more than a few shillings to call my own, and any attempt to persuade other people to let me have the management of *their* shillings would have been hopeless. The man was ready,’ said Mr. Mostyn, drawing himself up, ‘but the hour had not yet struck. I quarrelled with my family and enlisted.’

Here he stopped again, and I nodded; not exactly approval, I hope, but acquiescence. The thing had happened so long ago that it was ridiculous to censure it; and besides, it was not my business.

‘The life of a soldier, Dr. Dormer, is attractive to adventurous spirits, and though I never was an adventurer—far from it—I had my dreams of military glory. They lasted about three weeks, when I deserted.’

‘That was serious,’ I observed.

‘It was very serious, sir, in its consequences. I was detected, brought back again, and—it was in the old times, you see’—he hesitated, and once more I had the satisfaction of helping him out of his embarrassment—

‘I think I guess what happened,’ I said. ‘It may be indicated by a single letter, may it not?’

‘You are right. The letter *D*. It is branded between my shoulders. You are the great authority upon “brands” of this description. I am come here to have it removed.’

‘Well, really, Mr. Mostyn,’ said I, ‘I’ll do my best. But I never did have anything of this precise character to deal with—just let me look at it.’

He took off his coat and things and bared his shoulders.

‘What’s it like?’ he inquired. ‘I have cricked my neck a dozen times in trying to look at it. At the time it—it happened—though it was by no means a red-letter day for me in the usual sense—I had an impression—a very strong impression—that it was red.’

‘It is white now,’ I answered, ‘or nearly so; only when you strike it—see——’

‘I can’t see,’ returned the patient testily.

‘Quite true: I beg your pardon. You must take my word for it that when you strike it, it becomes red again.’

‘It’s quite visible, I conclude, whatever colour it is? eh, doctor?’

‘Well, yes, I am bound to say it is.’

‘You could read it ten feet off, I dare say? Come, be frank with me.’

‘I am not near-sighted, my dear sir,’ I replied, ‘and therefore could read it at twenty. It’s a very large letter.’

‘I don’t doubt it,’ he answered grimly. ‘It seemed to me at one time that I was all D. I must look like one of those sandwich-men who go about with capitals between their shoulders.’

‘Well, Mr. Mostyn, of course I should never have ventured to make use of such a parallel, but since you mention it, it *does* remind one of some sort of advertising medium. There are many things so advertised,’ I added consolingly, ‘of a most respectable character.’

‘No doubt,’ he answered drily. ‘My D must look like something theological and denunciatory.’

‘Or a certain famous sherry,’ said I, falling into his humour.

‘Ah, but that’s *not* brandied,’ he answered bitterly.

I confess I compassionated my visitor sincerely. To a man in his position, it must have been very disagreeable to have this tell-tale memento of the past about him. And, after all, I knew for certain nothing worse about him than that he had had a distaste for the army which, indeed, I shared with him. He had evidently a great deal of humour, which, in a private soldier, must be a very dangerous possession. ‘There is no discharge in that war,’ as the preacher says, unless you can purchase it; so that really he had had no alternative but to desert.

I think my visitor read something of my thoughts, for he observed: ‘You see, this may be a very unfortunate thing for me,

Dr. Dormer. People may say things behind my back and welcome, but if they *saw* things?’

‘Well, you don’t bathe in public, I conclude,’ said I consolingly.

‘No, but there are always risks. I might be run over by a cab and taken to a hospital. The idea of the possibility of disclosure makes me miserable. The higher I get in the financial world, the more dangerous my position appears to me. I have been twice “decorated” by foreign Governments; just imagine if it should come to be known that I had been decorated by my own, though (as we say in the House of Commons) “in another place.”’

I had forgotten that Mr. Mostyn was in the House. Indeed, that circumstance was merely a sort of pendant or corollary to his eminent position. He was essentially a man of mark, though until that morning, of course, I had never known how very literally he was so.

‘The question is, doctor,’ he continued gravely, ‘can you take it out?’

The phrase he used was a ridiculous one; a mark of that sort was not like the initials on a stolen pocket-handkerchief, to be picked out and smoothed away, and I frankly told him so.

‘The trace of the branding-iron is then indelible, I conclude?’

He was very cool, but I noticed his voice trembled in alluding to the instrument of his disgrace.

‘I am afraid so. Science—or at least *my* science—knows no means of eradicating it. There is, indeed, one method by means of which your secret may be preserved.’

‘Name it, and then name whatever fee you please,’ he exclaimed excitedly.

‘Well, you could be branded again in the same place with something different—some mark of good conduct, for example.’

He shook his head and put on his hat and other garments.

‘Thank you for your obliging offer,’ he said, ‘but I have had enough of that.’

It was obvious that he had quite made up his mind upon the point, so I did not press it, and we parted excellent friends.

The great financier’s visit, even had I done him any good, could, from the nature of the case, have been of no advantage to me in the way of advertisement; and as matters stood, except for his fee, I was not a halfpenny the better of it.

For six months afterwards I had no patient of any importance,

and almost began to think that my studies in tattooing were to have no practical result whatever. And yet the old house-surgeon at St. Kitts Hospital, who was reckoned a sagacious man, had given me this advice: 'My dear Dormer, be a specialist; do not attenuate your intelligence by vague and general studies; apply yourself to one thing only—"the little toe and its ailments," for example—and stick to it.'

One day a young lady called to consult me. She came in a hack cab, but I saw in a moment that she was used to a carriage and pair.

'I cannot give you my name,' she said, 'and I hope you will do me the favour not to seek for it.'

I bowed and assured her that I had no vulgar curiosity of that kind, though, on the other hand, it might be necessary, for professional reasons, to be made acquainted with her circumstances.

'My case,' she said, smiling, 'is scarcely one to require such a revelation. However, my position in life is good. I am engaged to be married to a gentleman of title. It is on account of that circumstance that I am paying you this visit.'

She looked so beautiful and blushed so charmingly, that if I had not been a professional man I should have envied that gentleman very much. Indeed, I could not help building a little romance about her in my own mind: perhaps she didn't like the man, who, being of title, was permitted by her family to persecute her with his attentions; and it might be that she was come to me to be tattooed in some temporary manner in order to choke him off. Her next words, however, showed that this supposition was quite unfounded.

'I love the gentleman, you must understand, doctor, very truly, and all my hopes are centred in him; but,'—here she began to stammer in the most graceful manner, like some lovely foreigner speaking broken English—'but, a long time ago' (my visitor was not more than eighteen at most), 'many years, in fact, I formed a girlish affection for my cousin Tom.'

'That very often happens,' I said encouragingly, for she had come to a dead stop. 'First love is like the measles (except that you catch it again), and leaves no trace behind it.'

'I beg your pardon,' she replied; 'in my case, it left a very considerable one.'

'Perhaps you had an exceptionally tender heart,' I said, turning my hands over in professional sympathy; 'such scars, however, are not ineradicable.'

‘Quite true,’ she said; ‘and even if they are, they are not seen, which is, after all, the main point.’

Then I knew of course that she was a young lady of fashion, and that sentiment would be thrown away upon her.

‘The fact is,’ she continued with some abruptness, ‘I may confess at once that I made a great fool of myself with Cousin Tom, and in a moment of mutual devotion we tattooed our names upon one another’s arms. In his case it mattered nothing, but as for me, I was very soon convinced of the folly of such a proceeding.’

‘You quarrelled with your cousin, perhaps?’ I suggested slily.

‘Of course I quarrelled with him; but whether that happened or not, the inconvenience of such a state of things would have been just the same. The idea of putting on ball costume was out of the question with a big “Tom” on my arm, such as schoolboys cut on the back of a tree. I had to affect a delicacy of constitution which compelled me always to wear high dresses. Think of that, sir.’

‘A most deplorable state of things,’ I murmured.

‘Well, I got used to *that*, and might in time have come to regard the matter with calmness; but, notwithstanding this comparative absence of personal attractions, I have had the good fortune to secure the affections of a very estimable young nobleman, and hence the affair becomes much more serious. Some day or another, he is almost certain to find out that hateful “Tom” upon my arm.’

‘There is no doubt a possibility of it,’ I assented gravely.

‘Well, that would be a dreadful blow to him, I’m sure; he is very sensitive and slightly jealous; and I have come to you to have that dreadful word erased.’

With that she turned up her sleeve, and on her white shoulder it was true enough the word ‘Tom’ was very legibly engraved, though fortunately not quite so much at large as she had led me to expect.

‘It does not look to me to have been done in gunpowder as usual,’ observed I after a careful scrutiny.

‘It wasn’t,’ she answered peevishly; ‘it was done in slate-pencil, which we scraped together (idiots that we were) on the same plate.’

‘It’s very well done,’ I answered; ‘that is, from a tattooing point of view. May I ask if the christian name of your cousin Tom has any resemblance to that of your intended husband?’

‘No, not the least. Why do you ask?’



*'It was done in slate-pencil.'*

‘ Well, if it had been anything similar—such as John, you see—we might have converted Tom into John, and nobody would have been any the wiser ; indeed, the young man would have taken it as a very pretty and original compliment.’

‘ That would have been a capital plan,’ assented the young lady admiringly ; ‘ unfortunately, however, his name is Alexis.’

As substitution was impossible, I was compelled to try erasure, and even that was a very difficult job. I had no idea that powdered slate-pencil could be so permanent. In the end, by persevering with infusions of milk, I contrived to tone down the objectionable ‘ Tom ’ to a vague inscription such as to a man of research would have suggested Nineveh or the Moabite stone ; in the case of Lord Alexis, however, I suggested that it might be attributed to the result of an unusually successful vaccination, and I have good reason to believe that that was the view he took of it.

As for the young lady, she showed her gratitude in a very practical way, and I owe a considerable portion of my present extensive practice to her good offices. In my whole experience, however, I have never had a more delicate case than hers.

JAMES PAYN.



*'Next we have the Ancestor himself.'*

# BELGRAVIA ANNUAL.

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## *The Humbling of the Memblings.*

BY WALTER BESANT.

**I**T is now forty years since Josiah Membling, clock- and watch-maker, retired from Gracechurch Street and the little shop, where he had done extremely well, to his native village in Essex. He was the son of a small farmer and the descendant of sturdy yeomen; the instincts of old family were strong in him; when, therefore, being a good way past sixty, he thought the time had come to sell the business and retire, he was encouraged by the fact that the Hall of his native village was for sale, with the park and grounds. He bought them; took his family into the country with him, and settled down, for the fifteen years of life which remained to him, not as a country gentleman exactly, for the good man had no idea of going into society, but as a mixture of retired tradesman and farmer. He farmed his own land, though he lost money by it: he found life dull after the stir of the city, and he continually yearned after the manufacture of watches and clocks, in which he was no mere seller of other men's work, but himself an ingenious and accomplished workman, who had duly served his seven years' apprenticeship, and was besides a mechanician by native genius.

During the latter years of his life the old man spent most of his time locked up in his own room. It was a very large room on the first floor, having two windows facing the south and four looking west; beside it was a small dressing-room which he occupied as a bedroom; and no one at all was ever allowed to enter the large room, which was always locked; but his grandson knew that it contained a bench, a lathe, and all the tools requisite for mechanical work. Sometimes he worked there till late at night, sometimes he would not come out even for dinner. There was

something uncanny about the old fellow working by himself continually, nobody knew at what. He might have made watches, but he brought none out; he might have turned things with his lathe, but none were ever shown; he might have been prosecuting some grand research in the horological mystery, but he said nothing about it.

He kept on working till the day of his death. It happened, one Saturday evening, that his unmarried daughter and his daughter-in-law were in the drawing-room when the old man unexpectedly walked in. He stood before the fire and looked at them, turning from one to the other with a strange smile. It was so seldom that he came out of his own room that the two ladies were perplexed and a little frightened.

‘My work,’ he said, with another weird and uncanny smile, ‘is finished.’

The words were hardly spoken when he suddenly reeled, caught at a chair, and fell heavily to the ground in a fit.

In the morning he became conscious again, and presently began to understand that he was dying, and that he had better give any directions he had to give at once. They sent for his grandson who was at Cambridge, and it was to him, his heir, that the old man gave the one injunction that he seemed to care about. ‘Let no one,’ he said, shaking his long and lean forefinger in the most solemn manner, ‘let no one presume to enter my room. Let it remain locked, or if any desire to enter’—here he laughed and his hearers shuddered—‘let him enter alone and after dark. I shall be there,’ he added, while they shuddered again, ‘on the watch,—a day and night watchman—a watch that always goes—a repeating watch, a keyless watch, with the newest improvements, an everlasting watch’—here his mind wandered a little—‘Watches neatly repaired. Established forty years. Clocks kept going.’ And then he laughed again and breathed his last. It was dreadful to see an old man die with a laugh upon his lips.

They buried him in the churchyard under a magnificent marble tomb, among a great number of Memblings, including his only son. And it was, as stated above, his grandson who succeeded, being then only one-and-twenty years of age.

His successor shortly afterwards married, and in course of time had a family, like most people, of sons and daughters. The young people knew very little about the watchmaker’s shop, but they knew that the churchyard was full of Josiah Memblings, and very easily they grew to believe in a legendary history about the family greatness. They were the ancient holders of the estate, the lords of the manor; they were found on the spot by the Norman Con-

queror; they experienced many adventures in the various civil wars; there came a time when their fortunes were quite fallen; even the Hall passed for a while out of their hands; then came the second founder, who amassed wealth in the City and bought back the old house. And they really did not know—the innocent girls who built up this legend—what a collection of fibs they were putting together.

For fifteen years and more the old man's last wishes were faithfully and piously obeyed. No one entered the old man's room at all; the key was in his grandson's possession; it became a matter of common belief that the old man haunted the room. The maids at dusk, and after dark, would hurry past the door; in full daylight they would stop and listen, trembling, if by chance they might hear the sound of a dead man's footfall; and the younger members of the family were brought up to feel doubly grateful to an ancestor who had not only restored the fortunes of the house, but had endowed it with a haunted room.

One day, however, when Laura, the eldest daughter, was in her father's study looking for something else, she found hanging up in a cupboard the key of the haunted room. It was a bright sunny morning; there could be no fear of ghosts on such a day; she looked at the key; she remembered the solemn injunction, which of course everybody knew, but the sight of the key filled her with strange and irresistible curiosity and a longing such as she had never before known; she took it down with a trembling hand; she crept like a thief out of the study and up the broad stair to the door; she put the key in the lock and turned it. It was a little rusty, but the bolt flew back and she opened the door. Strange, how hard she had to press that door with her shoulder before it opened; she went in and looked round curiously, yet but for a single moment; a grating noise behind her caused her to turn quickly; to her horror the door was closing of its own accord, and a great bar was slowly rising behind it. She shrieked and fled; there was just time; the door closed as she rushed through, there was a noise as of a falling bar, and Laura fainted away. When she recovered the maids were running up the stairs and about the house, wanting to know who had been ringing bells and who was making such a strange noise in the house.

When Laura told her story, her father put on the semblance of great wrath, but secretly he rejoiced because here was proof positive of the haunting. No family of yesterday ever got a ghost. In fact, it is only the members of an old family who can be got even to believe in ghosts at all. It is a curious thing that in poor and new neighbourhoods, like the East End of London, there seems no

place for a ghost. Now, for a thick population of ghosts, give me Northumberland.

The next day, Laura said that she had felt a cold breath upon her cheek.

The day after, she said that a heavy sigh had fallen upon her ear as she fled.

The day after that, she said that the sigh was a faint whisper of the words 'My dear child.'

It was enough. The ghost was established. Henceforth unpleasant things might be said of money made in trade, but the old family tradition would not be attacked. There was the evidence of the supernatural bar, there was the door closed by an invisible hand, there was the voice, there was the ringing of bells, there were the strange noises heard by the maids while Laura was lying supine and unconscious. No ancient Scottish House ever had such a ghost. The Squire, however, put away the key in his strong box, among his valuables. The door, he said, should never again be opened in his lifetime. But Laura used to stand outside like a Peri, listening for another message from the other world, and it became recognised in the family that she was her great-grandfather's favourite. This gave her a kind of rank. Respect was due to one thus singled out by an ancestor who had been such a benefactor as to become not only the restorer of fallen fortunes (which is in itself romantic), but also the family ghost. All the Memblings walked more upright than before; they stuck out their chins, so to speak; they believed in their Coat of Arms; what was better, other people believed in it as well.

They entertained people at the Hall, and when they offered them quarters for the night spoke with reserve of the haunted room; they laughed, but with affection and reverence, not with scorn, at their ghost; the girls bade their friends, when they left them after a hair-brushing, have no fear, because their ancestor worked very quietly and disturbed no one outside his own room, though, they added, as might be plainly heard by any who listened at the door after dark, he was always at work. It was, in fact, one of Laura's fictions that she could hear the lathe at work, and the Squire, who good-humouredly received the avowed incredulity of his friends, always finished the conversation by saying that the key of the room was in his strong box, where he intended it to remain.

Things might have gone on in this quiet and peaceful manner until now but for a misfortune, the nature and extent of which will become presently apparent. All misfortunes, said the Sage (who married his cook), proceed from love.

Yet, who would have thought that the Humbling of the Memblings would have followed upon so simple and natural a thing as the engagement of young Dalmahoy to Laura? Certainly not she herself, nor her father, nor her sisters and brothers, because Dalmahoy was in every respect a most eligible *parti*, being not only young, tolerably well off, and handsome, a good waltzer, a good rider, a good shot, a good actor, and one of those gallant headlong lovers before whom feminine courage breaks down, but he was also—a point naturally insisted upon by the Memblings—a man of undeniably good family. There was no trace or taint of trade in the long line of Dalmahoys.

When Jack Dalmahoy came to Membling Hall—the girls almost believed that the place had never possessed any other name, so that they could if they pleased call themselves the Memblings of Membling—one of the first things they did, after showing him their gardens, stables, and other interesting parts of the establishment, was to tell him of the family ghost. He naturally laughed, and spoke with disrespect of the spectre. Laura rebuked him, letting it be understood quite plainly that she was to be taken with her ghost or not at all. Who would offend his mistress by objecting to such a trifle? ‘I would gladly,’ said Jack, ‘have the ghost in my room every night if that would give you any pleasure. Invite him, Laura, to visit me.’

Laura gravely shook her head. This was not the proper spirit in which to speak of an ancestor who walked. He might even be listening at that very moment. Indeed, the opportune cracking of a piece of furniture gave some colour of probability to the supposition.

After dinner, when the ladies had gone, Jack asked the Squire to allow him to pass the night in the haunted room. His request was refused, gently but firmly.

‘I am not,’ said the chief of the Memblings, ‘a particularly superstitious man, but the fact that there is undoubtedly something supernatural in the room, and the equally undoubted fact that the appearances and manifestations are connected with my grandfather, make me respect his desire to remain after death unmolested in what was, in his lifetime, his favourite room.’

Laura was angry when she heard of this proposal. Did Jack, she asked, consider her great-grandfather in the light of a common ill-bred ghost, one of those unthinking and vulgar ghosts who break the crockery, throw the furniture about, rattle chains, and are disagreeable in the house? ‘For my part,’ she said, ‘I look upon the tenancy of this room by my dead ancestor as a singular proof of the affection in which he continues to regard us. His spirit remains with us,’ she added, clasping her hands and turning

her soft eyes, which were as limpid as a pair of opals, up to the heavens, 'because he loves us still. He is our guardian angel, he watches over the house. We are under his special protection, and if we were to lose him, through any act of irreverence or intrusion, farewell the luck of Membling Hall!'

Jack desisted, though loth to relinquish his interview with the ghost. Indeed, when one thinks how seldom one gets the chance of a talk face to face with a ghost, it is not surprising that Jack was sorrowful when it vanished. I have never myself had such a talk, and with the exceptions of a friend who saw the ghost of Joe Morgan, another who was privileged to amuse Lady Kitty, and a third who received Lady Bab, I think I know no one who has actually talked with them. And, without going quite so far as a certain learned counsel of my acquaintance, who ardently desires a half-hour's friendly interview with the devil, I must say that there are many ghosts for whom one would suffer a great deal of inconvenience and time. Doctor Johnson, Emanuel Swedenborg, Cagliostro, Doctor Dee, Cotton Mather, George Psalmanazar, the late Count of Albany, Robespierre, and Cornelius Agrippa, all occur to one in a breath as most interesting ghosts, if they would only come and talk in a friendly way and without frightening one. Two or three days afterwards Jack tried another line. As he could not be allowed to sit up all night and converse with the old watchmaker, he begged permission just to see the room. He would not go in, only open the door and look round. 'It is not, Laura,' he said, 'as if one wanted to go against your ancestor's express rule, but simply to pay a kind of—mark of respect—you know—morning call—just to look at the place, not even to go into the room.'

I believe that one of the reasons why the Squire refused permission to spend the night in the room was that he was afraid of revelations. You see, he knew more than his children, he entertained well-founded doubts as to the greatness of the House, he knew all about the shop, and it did occur to him that a conversation between his grandfather and his son-in-law might be awkward. Fancy a poor relation turning up when you have been comfortably established for a generation and a half, to remind your friends that the family crest was only forty years old or so, that the family history was fudge, and that the shop, the good, old, honest, despised shop was the foundation, and not the restoration at all, of the House; and fancy a Membling asked to turn a guest into a room where he might, and very likely would, be informed by the purchaser of Membling Hall how his money was made. 'We have,' the Squire might have reasoned, 'a highly respectable family ghost. But there are reasons why that ghost should be kept in the family,

and if it have disclosures to make or garrulous reminiscences to prattle upon, let these things be conveyed to the ear of a member of the family only. Or, as the ghost shows no inclination to leave his own room, let there be no disclosures at all. There is at least no occasion to invite revelations about the shop.'

The least ghostly time in the whole day, I take it, is the afternoon. No one expects even a medium to have any luck in the afternoon. *Séances* are always conducted after dark; old-fashioned wizards used to conjure up spirits at midnight; if devils, spectres, *lutins*, hobgoblins lasted till the morning, they were gone at all events by dawn. The 'garish light of day' is painful to supernatural eyes; they wink when it begins, they wink horribly if they have to endure it many minutes; long, long before noon they are away and in hiding. Who would have thought, then, that old Membling would have played the tricks he did, actually in the afternoon? You shall hear.

It was an afternoon in January—in the first week of the year. Snow was spread upon the fields, though it had melted on the roads; there was a gentle mist rising from the earth, through which the sun was shining feebly, a blurred circle of pale glory without warmth. But the sun was already sinking and the pale winter twilight was going to begin, the mist and the white snow making it lighter than usual and yet ghostly, if one can use the word of a four-o'clock appearance—an afternoon-tea-time manifestation. The light was strange.

Jack Dalmahoy and Laura after luncheon sat together, talking of the little nothings which please young lovers. Presently the conversation flagged. Then some young and sprightly devil, seeing the chance of doing a little mischief by firing Jack's imagination, which had at the moment nothing to work upon (being tired of pretending imaginary perfections in his Laura), whispered in his ear that it would be something to pay a visit to the haunted room. 'The very thing!' cried Jack with alacrity.

'What is the very thing, Jack?' asked Laura, looking up with surprise.

'My dear girl,' he said, 'let us go this afternoon; go, beg the key, we will pay a visit to the haunted room!'

Laura hesitated.

'You know, dear girl,' said her lover, 'that you are yourself as curious to visit the room as I myself.'

'I have seen it,' she replied, 'and I heard——'

'Yes, Laura.' Jack had heard the story before. 'I perfectly remember. But we shall only open the door and look in. Go, dear, and ask your father for the key.'

The Squire gave his consent with some reluctance. He even returned with his daughter, bearing the key with as much respect as if it were the key of a city's gates, such as that which the citizens of a mediæval town used to bring out when they had eaten up their last rat.

'Here is the key,' he said solemnly; 'if you merely open the door and look in, no harm will be done, I should think. As the sun is setting, you might even, if you please, go in. The injunction was that no one was to go in except after dark, and alone. But Laura may be considered an exception.'

Jack said that if he went in Laura should go with him, and that, as regards respect, he would look on the room as the family vault. Laura said he meant, she presumed, the church, not the vault.

First he oiled the key, which was rusty; then, accompanied by Laura, he turned it in the lock, and with some difficulty, because, he said, it was like some fellow pushing on the other side. He succeeded in opening it.

Could the 'fellow,' Laura thought with a shudder, be her revered ancestor?

When the door was open Jack forgot his promise, and stepped inside, looking about him curiously.

It was a long, low room, lighted by three narrow windows looking west, and reaching from floor to ceiling. It was most curiously furnished. For beside one window there was a table furnished exactly like one of those used by working watchmakers, with glasses in bone frames such as they stick in their eye when they look at a watch, and, observing a piece of dust, which they blow away and thereby release the machinery, declare that the watch requires cleaning, which will be eight-and-six. By such subtleties was the fortune of the Memblings commenced. Lamps, jets for gas, low stools, trays containing portions—dissected bones—of watches, small brushes and dusters, themselves covered with dust, now covered this table. Before the next window stood a lathe with tools, 'chunks,' and wheel. Before the next was another table, larger than the first, and covered with books, papers, mathematical instruments and drawings. 'My great-grandfather,' said Laura, thinking of the mythical and almost disbelieved shop of which even the younger members of the family were somehow conscious, 'was in his day a great mechanic.'

'What did he hang the walls with peacocks' feathers for?' asked Jack.

It was a strange thing: one side of the room was given over to a watchmaker's table, a lathe, and books on mechanics; the

other side was decorated with everything bizarre, as if the old man had resolved on gratifying his own taste without consulting the taste of the age. A Persian carpet lay on the floor; there was a broad sofa on which he had often slept, covered with costly skins, a chair also covered with skins stood facing it; common tobacco pipes and a common tobacco jar stood upon the plain mantelshelf, on which were such trifles as pots of glue and paste, glasses which suggested the 'rummer' of a country public-house, a spirit case open, a note-book, and an umbrella. The fireplace itself was a beautiful specimen of costly brass-work and tiles, there were carved cabinets very precious, filled with china, though the old man died before the great china revival was born, and there were pictures worth crying over, so delightful were they. The whole of that side of the room was covered with peacocks' feathers attached one over the other to the wall. The ceiling of the room was of polished oak, dark and deep, relieved with a little gold. The effect of the pale wintry light falling upon their splendours was very strange. Laura clasped her lover by the arm and gasped. Then she looked round and shrieked.

Six years before this, when she stood within the room, she had seen the door closing slowly, *and of its own accord*, before her. Now as she turned she saw that the same thing was happening again, but that it was too late; for with a heavy, grating noise the door shut closely, while, also of its own accord, there slowly fell behind it a heavy wooden bar.

As the bar fell there was a sound as of a deep sigh. Then all was silent.

The pair, thus strangely made prisoners, looked at each other with pale faces. Even the man, as brave a fellow as may be, saw with a terror which froze his blood this great bar lifted without visible hands, and falling slowly as if guided into its place. He rushed to the door and tried to lift it. Its free end was lying in a strong clamp closed by some spring. He could not lift it out, nor could he by any strength tear it away and open the door.

Another shriek from Laura called him to her side.

'Fingers,' she cried, 'fingers at my throat! Jack, save me, save me!'

Jack took her in his arms and soothed her. 'Nothing,' he said, 'can hurt us. Whatever it is, nothing *shall* hurt you till it first—oh, Lord!'

He stopped, because a breath of ice-cold air blew violently into his face, and again the solemn sigh was heard. Laura sank upon the floor, in a terror the like of which she had never imagined or

suspected. Jack lifted her gently and laid her upon the chair beside the fireplace.

What next? Laura held Jack by the hand, imploring him not to leave her—not to leave her alone. He stood beside her, his heart beating, his brain afire with wonder and terror. What next?

A third time they heard the sigh as of one in deep trouble and perhaps anger: again soft fingers touched Laura's throat, and again cold airs vexed their cheeks. Meantime it was growing darker: the sun was quite gone down; the short winter twilight was deepening into gloom, and the snow-fields through the windows stretched white and cold.

Then there began a ringing of bells and a beating of drums. Jack held Laura more tightly and whispered to her to be of good cheer; nothing, he declared with a positiveness which he did not feel, should or could hurt her while he was there.

The bells seemed all round them, as if they were being rung in their ears; they were soft and melodious bells, not harsh and strident, and the drums, like the bells, were soft; their rolling was as that of muffled kettle-drums, and when they stopped for a moment the heavy sigh was heard, as if lamenting the necessity for making all this noise. The bells rang and the drums beat for an hour and a half, as it seemed to the terror-stricken couple, prisoners in the room, who were fain to listen. In truth, they rang and beat for about five minutes, and then they stopped suddenly, and that dreadful, unseen person began to sigh again, heavily. Also Laura shrieked, because the fingers began to play again at her throat.

Of all forms of supernatural visitations, that of fingers at the throat has always seemed to me the least desirable. The apparition of a sheeted ghost, with or without chains, the squeezing of hands left inadvertently outside the sheets, the cold breathing upon the sleeping brow, the groaning behind wainscot walls, the dragging of chains, the sighing or sobbing by the bedside, the shying about of crockery, the shrieking in the garden, the upheaval of heavy furniture, the creaking on the stairs, the lurking in unsuspected places, the unreasonable claim to property in a place after you have become a ghost—all these things are effective, though perhaps overdone. New ghost machinery has to be invented if the popular imagination is to be fired, and I take it that the miserable falling off in ghosts during the last fifty years must be attributed mainly to the weariness of the imagination, which refuses any longer to be stirred by old-fashioned modes of

spiritual manifestations. Even rapping has had its day, and one sees no hope for ghosts in the future, unless they are prepared to bring trustworthy information as to the rules and regulations *d'outre-mer*. Then, indeed, there would be so great a run upon ghosts that the good old times would come back again, and many a musty family ghost, long since laughed at, scorned, and forgotten, would return, to bloom and blossom again among a curious and credulous posterity.

But to have one's throat felt, touched, and fingered by ghostly fingers! That is, if you please, a thing which in no way attracts the curiosity or stimulates the imagination. Quite the contrary; it simply terrifies.

Laura shrieked and would have fainted, had she thought it would be of the least use. But she was too much terrified for fainting. In real moments of crisis, in supreme moments, as the prigs say, one is too much in earnest to faint. One may faint comfortably when a tooth is pulled out, and feel all the better for it afterwards, but when a more serious operation is performed no one thinks about fainting, and takes chloroform instead.

'N—n—othing,' said Jack, with less heart in his tone than he could have wished, 'c—can hurt you while I am here.'

Yet there were fingers at her throat, and just then Laura would have sacrificed all the honour and glory of the family ghost could she have found herself safe outside that dreadful door with the bar let down to keep them in. Or, suppose her Ancestor had appeared, hungering, ravening for a life, I believe she would have given up her lover in the same spirit of duty as prompted Agamemnon to sacrifice Iphigenia, so as to get out of the mess with as much ease and safety as possible. But all that they had heard and seen were mere trifles, bagatelles, skittles, apple tart, compared to what they were about to see.

Suddenly the bells which had been ringing a melodious peal, and the kettle-drums which had been beating a muffled harmony, clashed and clanged in a horrific discord, at the hearing of which Laura moaned and groaned, while Jack, clutching her hand as if for his own safety, murmured mechanically, 'N—n—n—nothing c—c—c—an h—h—h—hur—' and here his jaws stuck and he said no more.

For at the clang and clash of the bells the curtains fell before the windows, and they were in darkness absolute.

It seemed next as if the end of the room was taken away, and another room opened to their eyes.

There was nothing at all in this room, but it was lighted by

a large window at the end, and a long narrow window at the side. The glimmer from the snow without gave sufficient light for the intruding pair to see the things which presented themselves.

The bells stopped, the drums stopped. Then there began a wailing plaintive music, a tune never heard on earth, which seemed, like the bells and the drums, to be played around them, above them, below them. And while this weird and ghostly tune was slowly played, there appeared suddenly, not, said Laura afterwards, as if they sprang from the ground or dropped from the skies, but suddenly, as if they came from nowhere, three skeletons. In the dim light one could discern their shadowy forms, the lean fingers with which they pointed, the long bony legs with which they danced—they actually danced!—the hollow, eyeless sockets and grinning teeth of the skulls. As they came, so they disappeared, as suddenly, as silently.

But the music, the supernatural, weird, and ghostly music, went on, and then—ah! then—the final manifestation appeared. For, as if he had stepped from the wall, Laura saw her great-grandfather—the Actual Family Ghost itself—walk slowly, and as if with difficulty, across the room, and as he neared the opposite wall, he turned, faced his great-granddaughter, and with his white locks and white beard faintly visible, he seemed to hold up a warning forefinger and disappeared.

Then the music ceased; the room of the ghost and skeletons disappeared; the curtains which had fallen before the windows were drawn back, and there was silence.

‘Jack!’ said Laura.

‘G—g—g—ood heavens!’ cried Jack.

‘Are we living, Jack?’

‘G—g—g—ghosts!’ said Jack.

‘Do you think it is over, Jack?’ asked Laura.

‘N—n—n—othing——’ began Jack, when Laura, looking round, saw to her delight that there was a gleam of artificial light in the doorway, which showed that the door was open. She rushed to the place; the great bar was gone; the door was ajar; Laura yelled for help, rushed through, and fell headlong in the passage. The cause of her fall, I am ashamed to say, was no other than Jack himself, who rushed after her. Both fell down, like Jack and Jill, and lay sprawling together.

That evening Laura did not appear at dinner; her mother sent for the doctor, and she was ordered to bed. Somebody sat up all night with her, and in the morning she was delirious: the system, said the doctor, had sustained a severe shock.

As for Jack, he ordered his things to be got ready at once,

and drove straight back to Colchester, leaving word that he was ordered back on regimental duty. But when he got there he was fain to drink so much soda and brandy that he too, like Laura, was put to bed.

Thus, for two or three days, the story of the dreadful apparition at Membling Hall never got about.

When Laura got better she told the story, sitting up in bed, to her sisters: she was a girl of a fine imagination and an eye to dramatic situation, therefore the story lost nothing in the telling; the sighs, the sobs, the cold breath, the fingers at the throat, the skeletons, the bells, and the weird music, with the dread vision of her great-grandfather at the end, were all duly narrated. The sisters told their father. The Squire enjoined secrecy, but left a corner open in the case of trusted friends; everyone had a trusted friend. Therefore, before Jack returned, he was assailed on all sides by questions about the ghost of Membling Hall, and had to explain, although with fear of making himself ridiculous, that it was a real, unmistakable ghost—a devil of a ghost, accompanied by every kind of row and appearance calculated to shake a fellow's nerves and make him feel uncomfortable. Jack was not a man of lively imagination, but the things he had seen were so extraordinary that he had only to tell them exactly as he had seen them. And it would be wonderful, had we the time, to relate the two forms which the story took when related by Laura the imaginative, and by Jack the matter-of-fact.

Think, however, of the pride of the Memblings at this proof incontrovertible of their family ghost. Where was there, anywhere in England, a house with such a ghost, so complete in all its parts, so provided with machinery, material gear, and supernatural assistants? Was it not a great honour to them that their ghost did not appear unattended, but was provided with a body-guard, or spirit-ward, of three dancing skeletons? Was there any other ghost at whose bidding bells would ring and drums would beat? It was like a royal progress. Josiah Membling's spirit was welcomed, as he himself would have wished, like a Lord Mayor on Lord Mayor's day. Did ever man hear tell of any other ghost who could command, so to speak, a private orchestra of his own, to play music at his coming?

The mere telling of the story became a fearful joy to Laura and to the faithful Jack. It was a dreadful experience to have undergone; but, like a shipwreck on a desert island, once worried through, it became a grand and splendid distinction. Laura's sisters envied her: Laura's brothers envied her. The Squire was proud of her; the story brought the greatest credit to the family:

Laura might have adopted the motto of Queen Elizabeth, *Dux femina facti*.

She became an extremely interesting person, and began to cultivate the sadness which belongs, somehow, to all persons privileged to hold communication with the outer world. She sat in shadowy corners, or in the dim firelight without a lamp, in the long and dark room called the library, where she told her story with clasped hands, while the light of the fire reddened her pale cheek and showed up the luminous depths of her large soft eyes; her auditors gathered round her catching breathlessly at her words, and looking over their shoulders on the chance of seeing the spectre behind them. But he never came. 'My great-grandfather,' said Laura, 'will never, I am persuaded, leave the room in which he has chosen to dwell. Let us have no fear. Indeed,' she added, smiling sadly, 'why should we fear? He who restored the fortunes of the House, and is good enough to watch over it after his passing away, can hardly be feared. He may hear, no doubt he does hear, all that is said and done in the Hall, therefore let us always speak of him with the Reverence and Awe which he deserves.'

They came from all parts of the country to hear the story. Laura was obliged to be at home every afternoon. Jack was not allowed to leave her chair, in order to be ready to corroborate any statement. He shone as the lesser light, not being permitted to tell the story himself because he was not a good *raconteur*, and because a certain sterility of imagination forbade those developments of facts which are necessary in a perfect ghost story. But he could put in a word by way of proof, and was immensely useful as the Witness. A ghost, like a miracle, requires the testimony of two or more credible persons.

'I shall never,' said Laura, 'never again bear to hear the least frivolous or scoffing allusion to the appearance of Spirits. The subject will always be associated in my mind with a Manifestation which was truly Awful.'

'Awfully Awful,' said Jack, behind her chair.

'I cannot understand, now, how I lived through it. Indeed, I must have died with terror, had it not been for the invincible fortitude of Jack, who, I will say in his presence, behaved with perfect courage and reverence throughout. What reassured me first, and convinced me that no harm was intended, was the celestial music which preceded the most awe-inspiring sight, the last scene of all.'

'What was it like, the music?' whispered a young lady.

'Like a waltz tune,' said Jack.

‘Not the least like a waltz tune,’ said Laura. ‘You might as well call a recitative from Handel a waltz tune: better, in fact, because Handel’s music is the work of a man, whereas this—oh! this that we heard—whose work was it?’ She lifted hands and eyes, and remained silent in ecstatic contemplation of the ceiling. ‘My dear,’ she continued after an interval, during which the gentlemen thought they were in church and looked into their hats, ‘it is impossible to describe that music. It fell upon the soul like some utterance of Power: we were awed, not terrified by it——’

‘It was something like a musical box,’ said Jack.

‘It was nothing of the sort, sir,’ Laura interrupted. ‘The sound was like no earthly music. It was tuneful, but no human voice could reproduce the tune: the harmonies were too subtle and too profound for human art; the instruments may have been in form like our own, but of a sweetness, of a force which I could never, never hope to convey to your imagination.’

‘Made a devil of a row,’ Jack whispered, in corroboration, to a man beside him.

‘Was there any singing?’ asked another lady. ‘Oh! if they had sung a hymn—*what* an addition to our choir it would have been!’

‘I heard no words,’ Laura sighed. ‘That is, I could distinguish none. But it seemed to me as if, far off—oh! far, far away—there was a choir of voices upraised in harmony.’

‘One fellow groaning——’ Jack began, but was instantly checked as Laura went on.

‘The music preceded the Dance of Death’—Laura stopped and trembled—‘nothing more terrible could be conceived. As the skeletons danced, pointing their long bony fingers at us, they seemed to warn us of the flight of time. Their aspect was not forbidding, nor were their gestures angry.’

‘Grinned at us,’ said Jack, ‘like the very ——’

‘Could,’ interrupted Laura hastily, ‘could such a pageant, such a spiritual apparition, have suggested the “Danse Macabre” to Holbein and the mediæval painters?’

‘Like a hornpipe,’ said Jack. ‘Never saw such a lively lot: double-shuffle, heel-and-toe, walk-round, all complete.’

‘How long did the dance continue?’ asked a visitor, shuddering.

‘We took no count of time,’ replied Laura. ‘I do not suppose that as the clocks went we were in the room for ten minutes; yet what we saw must have taken about a day and a half, at least. How long, Jack, do you think the bells were ringing?’

Jack shook his head, and said he thought they were never going to stop.

‘Then,’ continued Laura, ‘there were the sighings and the sobbings, the cold winds, the beating of the drums, the playing of the music before the Terrible Dance. Hour after hour passed away: we were ravished out of ourselves: we were lost in wonder and awe: we felt no hunger: our pulses stopped, and the beating of our hearts! We were without any fear, were we not, Jack?’

‘Quite,’ replied Jack. ‘I was never more composed in my life.’

‘But there was more, was there not?’ asked another visitor. ‘We heard that you saw the spirit of your Ancestor himself.’

Laura sank her voice to a whisper.

‘You heard aright,’ she said solemnly. ‘The manifestations ended with no less an appearance than that of my revered Ancestor himself, the Restorer of the House—even the Second Founder.’ She spoke as if Julius Cæsar himself or even King Alfred had been the first of the Memblings.

‘How—how did he appear?’ gasped her audience.

‘He was dressed in a long dressing-gown, such as he usually wore in his lifetime.’

‘And yet,’ murmured a triumphant spiritualist, one of the audience, ‘they say that clothes have no ghosts. Absurd! Matter, as has been proved over and over again, can always be represented visibly by spirits. Pray go on, Miss Membling. I have never during all my investigations met with a more interesting experience than this of yours. It will confound every sceptic.’

‘Dressed in his long gown,’ Laura resumed, ‘he moved slowly, almost painfully, across the room. He appeared suffering from the debility of extreme old age——’

‘Quite so—quite so!’ the spiritualist rubbed his hands. ‘I have always maintained that they appear as they left the world, no older and no younger. Pray go on.’

‘As he moved he turned his face towards us and smiled. You saw him smile, Jack, as plainly as I did?’

‘Well,’ said Jack with hesitation, ‘he certainly wagged his head, and I saw his beard wobble, but I can’t honestly say that I saw him smile.’

‘He would not smile for a stranger,’ said the spiritualist.

‘The most benignant countenance: the sweetest smile: the kindest look in his eyes: with long silvery locks and a white beard. As he disappeared, he raised his hand as if to bestow his benediction upon us. You saw that, Jack?’

‘Oh, yes! he lifted his hand.’

‘I think, but I am not sure, that I heard him murmur a blessing as he disappeared.’

‘Did he, now,’—asked the scientific explorer of Ghostland—‘did he sink into the ground, or did he ascend into the air?’

‘He disappeared,’ said Laura. ‘He seemed to touch the wall and to vanish.’

‘He came out of one wall,’ said Jack, ‘and went into the other wall.’

‘And did you,’ asked the spiritualist, ‘hear the Blessing?’

‘No, I did not,’ replied Jack.

‘The Blessing,’ explained the scientific specialist, ‘was for the House alone. You heard nothing, then?’

‘Why,’ Jack said, considering, ‘he shuffled a bit with his feet as if his slippers were uneasy.’

And so it went on, day after day, Laura receiving visitors and telling the story over and over again. Jack was neither imaginative, nor was he properly impressed. He had seen things and heard things: that was undeniable. But he drew no conclusions. He was thus a foil to Laura, and by his very downright matter-of-fact doggedness he corroborated her statements. The story, little by little, improved: the heavenly music was, in a few days, provided with a heavenly choir; the bells were a peal; the dance of death was a procession of skeletons, who danced as they crossed the room, in number about a hundred and fifty; the Benediction of the Ancestor was pronounced in a solemn whisper which could not reach the grosser ear of Jack, but was perfectly audible to Laura. The fair narrator herself became daily more penetrated with the greatness and grandeur of her position: she also, to Jack’s disgust, became more spiritualised, tried to live on nothing, grew certainly pale and thin, and ceased to take the same interest as of old in the little tendernesses which her lover was willing to lavish upon her.

It was agreed, by the advice of the spiritualist, that the history should be written down—soberly, he said, and with due attention to dates, times, and the corroborative testimony of Jack—and printed, for the good of the world and the solace of mankind. Laura spent, therefore, a fortnight in the production of what was called a ‘Plain Statement.’ Her intimate friends observed that the written narrative did not quite correspond with her former statements, and Jack owned that he had not heard the choir singing hymns, nor seen the Blessing with both hands. But these things mattered little in the face of so tremendous and undoubted a series of apparitions.

The Squire gave his consent to have the story printed—but, he said, for private circulation only. Let the knowledge of the

Ghost be whispered abroad: that could not, he supposed, be avoided: but the actual facts concerned only the immediate friends of the House, and not the general public, whose curiosity he, for one, was not disposed to gratify by relating private events, and the experiences, however singular, of his daughter. The 'Narrative' or 'Plain Statement' was accordingly printed on the finest and creamiest of toned paper, with a portrait of the Ancestor. The date of his death was not stated, but from the mediæval appearance of the face and the cut of the beard, in which the limner improved on the original oil painting (that of Josiah Membling as a Common Councilman), the venerable Ancestor might have belonged to the thirteenth or fourteenth century. All this greatly added to the glory of the family, and tended to confirm their position as belonging to the County. With what face could anyone sneer at people as new comers whose ancestors remained in their old rooms, and appeared to give benedictions to the female branches of their posterity? Could the Howards, the Courtenays, the Montmorencies, the Lusignans, expect more?

The 'Narrative' off her hands, Laura began to descend slowly from the higher spiritual levels and to talk of ordinary things in her ordinary manner, so that Jack Dalmahoy plucked up courage and renewed his courtship at the point where the ancestral spirit had broken it off. He was by this time growing weary of the worship or cult of the old ghost, and it bored him to be perpetually recalling the dancing skeletons and the shadowy figure with the long white hair. Then, it was annoying for a plain man to be constantly invited to remember a heavenly chorus, a benediction, a warning look, or a sweet and gracious smile. Therefore he was anxious to get his courtship over and to carry away his bride. When he mentioned the desirability of naming the day, Laura declared at first that nothing should ever persuade her to leave a house possessed of so many and such rare blessings. Jack argued that if a girl gets engaged she means to have her own house. Laura replied that she had not, on entering into the engagement, foreseen that she should receive the benediction of her Ancestor. Jack responded that the benediction did not tell her that she was not to get married, 'unless,' he added, with unusual bitterness, 'you are going to marry your great-grandfather yourself? Don't believe——' He stopped short here, thinking it would be well not to say anything about the heavenly choir or the gracious smile till after his marriage.

Laura reflected, sweetly holding her hands clasped and her head a little on one side in the attitude of reflection. The thought crossed her mind that it would be a pity to give up such a good-

natured, good-looking, and well-to-do lover for the sake of a ghost whom, perhaps, she would never see again. And presently she murmured softly, 'Jack, do you think my Ancestor would come with us to our new home and abide with us?'

'Oh, Lord!' cried Jack in a voice of such genuine consternation that Laura forgot her affectation and burst into a hearty laugh, after which Jack found no difficulty in getting her to talk about a day.

They were to be married after Lent, that was agreed upon, and after an infinite amount of discussion it was further covenanted that the day should be the last day of April. This gave them a clear five weeks for preparation, and Jack was ordered back to his garrison work to be out of the way until he should be wanted to take his part in the approaching ceremony.

The excitement of the time that followed kept Laura's thoughts a good deal from her ghost, whose home was not further intruded upon. By some curious current of feeling, assisted, no doubt, by Laura's appropriation of the family ghost to herself, it was generally considered that the ghost might feel offended at the departure of the one member of the family to whom he had condescended to reveal himself, one lady going so far as to prophesy disaster. And when it came, in way and manner as shall be presently set forth, she only said it was what she expected and always said would happen, and that if Laura had not been bent upon going away, no doubt evil spirits would not have been allowed to work their wicked will, and all this shame would not have fallen upon the family.

Among the members of the Dalmahoy family was a first cousin of Jack's, a young fellow of an inquiring mind, who was reading at Cambridge for mathematical honours. He was invited to be best man to his cousin on the joyful occasion, and joined the wedding party at Membling Hall two or three days before the auspicious morning. The house was quite full, and the usual excitement of looking at the wedding presents, flirting with the bride's-maids, dancing, and the rest of it, passed the time more agreeably for Mr. George Dalmahoy than if he had been dining in the college hall and spending his evenings in an undergraduate's room. Of course almost the first thing which he heard of was the ghost, and this immediately fired his imagination.

He read the 'Narrative.' Then he cross-examined Jack, and elicited from him that the superstructure, so to speak—the heavenly choir and the rest of it—was an addition made by Laura herself after the event; that is to say, Jack neither saw nor heard any of it. On the other hand, there could be no manner of doubt

that the 'Narrative' was substantially true, and that very strange things had happened.

Mr. George Dalmahoy determined that he too would, if possible, witness these things. Why should not the ghost appear to him as well as to his cousin? As for the Benediction, he dismissed it with contempt. Jack had seen an old man's figure, bent, with streaming white hair, 'shuffling,' as he put it, across the floor. That was by itself quite remarkable enough. 'No need,' said George, 'of any benedictions; enough to be able to show himself, lucky old ghost!' He considered himself an expert in the art of investigating stories of ghosts. He was, to begin with, entirely incredulous, and, in the second place, he knew that it is nonsense to deny phenomena. Raps, for instance, are certainly heard, ears are boxed in the dark, noses pulled, heads banged. He had once inflicted unspeakable mortification on a medium by beginning the raps himself before she was ready, and spelling out dreadful messages which she did not understand; and on another occasion, when a spirit had been good enough to 'incarnate' herself, this untrustworthy person lit a match and disclosed no other than the medium herself dancing about wrapped in a newspaper. He had also written an article on the subject for a college magazine, and had a shelf full of books treating of spiritualism. He was thus fully prepared for an encounter with the Ancestor of the Memblings, and ardently longed to begin.

He first approached the subject with Laura, asking her, reverently, if one could be allowed to visit the haunted chamber after dark. She replied with emotion that no one with her consent should be allowed to open the door of that room at all. She considered that to disturb its occupant was pardonable only when done by inadvertence and ignorance, as happened to herself and Jack. As for a stranger presuming to do so, that, she said, would most likely draw upon his head the most fatal consequences. She could only compare the daring of such a deed with the audacity of the ancient king, who drew the lightning down from heaven and was killed by it as a punishment.

Thus rebuffed, George Dalmahoy went to head-quarters and sought the Squire in his library. Mr. Membling was an easy man, a little touchy about his ancient birth, but now in excellent spirits and on the best of terms with everybody, in consequence of the highly creditable match his daughter was making. Naturally he was disposed to receive all the bridegroom's people with great civility.

It was after luncheon, and a glass or two of burgundy had disposed the Squire to benevolence towards all mankind. He was

seated before the fire, his legs crossed, his hands folded, prepared for the sleep which sometimes overtakes middle-aged gentlemen after a comfortable midday meal. To him George stole softly, and, taking a chair by the fire, turned the conversation adroitly on ancient families. Then he began to talk about the peculiarities of families, their ways, their distinctive marks, their little characteristic possessions, how a stutter distinguishes the sons of one house, and a distinctive birth-mark the sons of another; how in one house no eldest son ever succeeds, and in another ill luck pursues all the daughters; how a Banshee belongs to one family, a White Lady to another, and a little child to a third. 'As to your own house,' said George, 'we have all heard of your ancient ghost.' George put it as if the ghost had been established many centuries.

The Squire laughed pleasantly.

'Yes, we have our ghost, and I assure you, Mr. Dalmahoy, that we are rather proud of the distinction, as one may call it.'

'A distinction truly! Particularly so well authenticated a ghost as it is. You keep the chamber locked, I believe?'

'Yes. You see, we would not have the maids frightened, nor would we—perhaps you think us superstitious—disturb the occupant.'

'Quite so—quite so,' said George. 'However, ghosts only walk at night, and as there is no possible fear of disturbing the occupant by daylight, I wish you would lend me the key; I should like just to look round the room, if you have no objection.'

'Well, you see,' replied the Squire, 'the fact is, we have rather a strong objection. The last words of the—the spirit—were that no one was to dare enter the room unless alone and after dark.'

'I respect your feeling,' said George; 'yet I think it would be most injudicious to invade the privacy of the room—after dark. Everything that we know, my dear sir'—here he assumed the character of a believer—'everything that we have learned respecting apparitions, the manners and customs, the preferences, so to speak, of the outer world, shows us that its inhabitants, when they reside among us, are in some way prevented from feeling our intrusion or even our presence in the day-time. They may be sleeping; they may be'—here he dropped his voice and paused—'elsewhere. Their power to be seen and heard is given them for use after dark alone.'

'That seems very true,' said the Squire; 'it was after dark that Laura——'

'So that, in asking you to hand me the key of the room,' his visitor went on, 'I am really doing nothing more than seeking to

gratify a curiosity—call it idle, or say it springs from reverence—a desire, in fact, only to see the theatre of these curious and unique manifestations.’

The Squire, moved by these words and by the benevolence of burgundy, and recognising the spirit in which they were uttered, went to his safe and produced the key, adjuring his guest, at the same time, should he see anything, to leave the room immediately.

With a cheerful mien George Dalmahoy proceeded to the haunted chamber.

He experienced the same difficulty in opening the room which had been felt by his cousin. The key turned pretty easily, but the door stuck. And when he pushed it open there was heard a grating noise which did not seem natural to the nature of a door.

We have seen what manner of room was the haunted chamber. But when it was last visited it was in the pale twilight of a January day. Now, at the end of April, the sun was shining brightly through the windows, and the room was cheerful. Certainly not at all the sort of time for a ghost to walk. Spectres shun sunshine, as the copy-books might say. George looked about him with a little disappointment. A curiously furnished room: that was all.

His disappointment did not last long: a creaking sound behind made him turn round. A large bar was slowly descending across the door. The progress was slow, but it finished by dropping into its place: the door was closed. George tried to lift the bar. It was immovable.

‘Good!’ he said. ‘This is how Jack began. Can it be that the Ancestor is going to take an afternoon dander round the room?’

Apparently he was, because the closing of the door was followed by the ringing of bells, beating of drums, sighs, a breath of cold air which had so terrified his cousin.

While he was listening and watching—in some disquietude, it must be owned—he felt something delicate and light touching his cheek; he turned quickly. Nothing.

‘Bells,’ he said, ‘there certainly are, and drums; and there is a noise which Tom said was sobbing; it seems to me like—Hallo!’

Again the gentle touch upon his cheek; this time he put up his hand as one catches at a troublesome fly, and caught—one of the peacock’s feathers. He then observed that several of them were slowly lifting themselves up and down.

‘This,’ said George Dalmahoy, ‘is more curious than the bells.’

Mounting on a chair he examined the place where the feather was attached to the wall. To his great surprise he found that it was fitted into a small brass tube, and that the tube itself was moving slowly up and down, carrying the feather with it.

‘Very odd,’ said George. ‘It was not a ghostly finger at my throat, but a feather: and the feather is not lifted by a ghostly hand, but by a brass tube. And what the devil lifts the brass tube? I suppose,’ he added after a pause, ‘that the same thing lifts the brass tube which rings the bells and beats the drums. Is it the Ancestor? Would he come if I called him names?’

It seemed as if the Ancestor must have heard these irreverent remarks, because at that moment the wall at the end of the room seemed suddenly to disappear; the bells ceased, and music of some kind was heard.

‘All this,’ said George, feeling more than a little afraid, ‘is most wonderful, and just as Jack reeled it all out. To be sure, I could not make out how he could have invented it. What next? Oh, Lord!’

For at that moment the skeletons appeared and began to dance.

The young man’s knees knocked together for a moment and his cheek turned pale. Then he rallied his courage and ‘made for’ the skeletons.

They were capering with the most grotesque and extraordinary agility, legs and arms moving all at once, skulls shaking and nodding; even the backbone twisting, or at least seeming to twist. George presently seized one of the arms.

‘Gad,’ he cried, ‘it’s real bones—with wire in the joints—real ribs—and’—here he laughed aloud—‘they are all three hanging by strings!’

He contemplated this phenomenon with curiosity, but no terror.

Then the lower panels of the wall beside him opened, and there came out the figure of a man.

‘Aha!’ said George, ‘here is the Ancestor! How are you, old boy?’

The figure was dressed in a long dressing-gown, and had on silk stockings and old-fashioned knee-breeches. The knees were bent and the figure stooping, and as it moved slowly and by jerks, it seemed to be on the point of falling to pieces. George stopped in front of it and began calmly to feel and punch it.

‘You’re stuffed with sawdust,’ he said contemptuously, ‘and you are dropping to bits, and the moths have got into your poor old sleeve; and the white wool is falling off your poor old pate,

and your mask is hanging by a thread. You an Ancestor? You ridiculous old MUG!

The miserable ghost made no reply, but continued its journey across the room. When he reached the opposite wall the panels opened to admit him, and he disappeared.

‘This is the Ancestor!’ said George in great enjoyment. ‘Shut up, you with your dancing, you poor old skeletons! Nobody cares about you. This is the benevolent Ancestor! This is his Benediction! This is his sweet and winning smile! Ho! ho! ho!’

Just then the music ceased: the skeletons disappeared—that is to say, they flew up into the ceiling: there was a sigh as if somebody was tired and glad that the job was over: George observed that what he had taken for a disappearance of part of the wall was really only the folding back of the middle of a wooden partition wall cutting off one end of the room. He also observed that the bar of the door was lifting as slowly as it had fallen.

All was over, therefore.

He had seen the family ghost: it was a big doll, dropping slowly to pieces with age, damp, and the ravages of moths; he had seen the fearful procession or Dance of Death, ‘the gibbering skeletons succeeding one another in swift succession, each playing its antics as it passed, and beckoning to us with lean and bony fingers.’ (Extract from the ‘Narrative.’)

Well, there were three musty skeletons let down from a trap in the ceiling by string or wires, the lifting and dropping of which produced their contortions and dancings. He had heard the ‘celestial orchestra, faint, though complete in all its parts, playing music not to be described, yet ever to be remembered, accompanied by a choir of faint sweet voices, singing what seemed a hymn of praise.’ (Extract from ‘Narrative.’) Yes, he had heard it. ‘By Gai,’ he said, ‘it was a musical-box, and it played an old-fashioned slow *trois-temps*! As for choir and heavenly voices—fudge!’

He had heard the bells and the drums. Yes; there were bells and drums; who could have rung the bells and beaten the drums?

The bar was up: he could go: the show was over.

Yet, what did it mean?

George went to one of the windows and looked out, thinking. Beside him stood a table, of which we know. He took up one or two of the things: they were instruments used in making and mending a watch. The table was an old, rough, black bench, which, in fact, had been the old man’s bench during all the years of his working life. ‘I remember,’ said George, ‘one of them made his money in trade: he was a watchmaker.’ Then he saw before the

next window a lathe with all the appliances, and a carpenter's bench fitted up with tools. Half-made things, rounded blocks, pulleys, small light chains, lay about the bench. 'Old man was a carpenter and turner too, I suppose,' said George. Then he went to the next table. This was covered with books and papers. 'Old man read mechanics,' said George. He took up one of the sheets covered with drawings. Then he took up another. Then he looked round him and nodded. Then he laughed. Then he looked at his watch. Then he went to the carpenter's bench, took out some tools, and proceeded to work.

It was a quarter of an hour before he finished, and already past five o'clock. He rubbed his hands with the greatest satisfaction. 'This,' he said, 'is the best day's work I have ever done.'

Then he opened the door and stepped out.

'Holy Moses!' he cried, surprised into an exclamation which cannot be justified, and yet must be considered pardonable when one has to tell what he saw.

Now it came to pass that, just as the bells began to ring in the haunted chamber, Laura herself, accompanied by one of the bride's-maids, passed by the door. What was her terror and astonishment to hear the dread sound, only heard by herself, begin again! 'He calls me!' she cried, grasping her friend by the arm. 'He calls me; I must go!'

She rushed to the door, but could not open it.

'Can it be,' she gasped, 'that there is some one in the room? Is it Jack? Oh, Katie, run, run to my father—he is in the library—tell him to bring the key. . . Ah! it is in the lock—tell him to come—to come quickly!'

On being awakened, Mr. Membling acknowledged that he had lent the key to George Dalmahoy, and followed the bride's-maid to the door. By this time the greater part of the guests were assembled on the spot, grouped round Laura, who stood gazing at the door, her hand clasping the faithful Jack's. The bells were certainly ringing and the drums beating; presently the sound of music was heard.

'Hush!' said Laura. 'It is the heavenly music; I hear the voices of those who sing.'

She sank on her knees; the other girls followed her example: kneeling in a semicircle, reverential, but careful that their dresses lay in becoming folds. An ignorant spectator might have thought that they were rehearsing the ceremony of the next day. Behind the kneeling girls stood some of the elder ladies and one or two gentlemen. As for Jack, he stood, Laura still holding his hand, visibly disconcerted. He had a round hat, having just come from

a walk, and when Laura implored him to kneel too, he compromised by putting his head in his hat.

They continued to kneel during the whole time of the noises; when they had ceased, they heard a tapping and a hammering. So they went on kneeling, though all were getting anxious to see what would come of it. And it was into this group that George Dalmahoy plunged when he opened the door and uttered that rude and irreverent interjection.

Laura shrieked; they all sprang to their feet, and shrieked together like a chorus on the stage.

George looked in bewilderment. Then he laughed: he laughed long and loud.

‘He is mad,’ said Laura suddenly.

George laughed louder still.

‘Jack, this is dreadful,’ said Laura.

The others stared in a sort of amazement; what could the man be laughing at? It was like a comic song of which only the singer sees the point. They all looked so bewildered, and Laura so awe-struck and terrified, that George speedily ceased laughing. Indeed, the belief in the ghost was now so deep in everybody’s heart that they had finally made up their minds that the rash young man, like one who inadvertently looked upon Artemis in the forest, had been slain by the angry Ancestor, or else, like him who chanced to meet great Pan, had been stricken by some madness. And lo! he was before them laughing like an idiot.

‘Ladies and gentlemen,’ said the young man, ‘I have an important announcement to make. The ghost walks by day as well as by night. If you will follow me into the room, you shall see him for yourself. He is a most obliging ghost, and will do no harm to anybody.’

He laid his hand upon the handle of the door as he spoke.

They looked at each other.

‘Oh,’ cried Laura, ‘this is dreadful! Jack, stop him! Mr. Dalmahoy, do not call others after you to their undoing! Oh! What shall we do? what shall we do?’

For now George pushed open the door and the wedding guests crowded after, Jack and Laura following with the rest. Last of all came the Squire, and upon his face there was a look of anxiety. He had a sense of impending evil.

‘Spirit of my Ancestor!’ cried Laura, sinking upon her knees, ‘forgive them! Forgive us all! Let not this intrusion lead thee to revoke thy Benediction.’

Strange to say, this appeal produced no effect upon the young madman, who only laughed scornfully.

‘You shall see him directly,’ he said; ‘you can then ask him yourself.’

At this moment the door shut noisily.

‘Look at the bar,’ said George; ‘that is the first business; now we are shut in.’

They all looked at each other, after observing the descent of the bar.

‘The whole secret lies in the bar,’ he went on. ‘Now look at this wall; you will see the peacock’s feathers jumping up and down; if anybody is within reach, they will feel the light touch of ghostly fingers on their cheeks. Very fine business this, for a spectre in a country house.’

In fact, this happened as he had foretold.

‘Ghostly fingers, Jack,’ said George to the joint author of the ‘Narrative.’ ‘Next, bells and drums.’

They began; George pushed aside two panels and showed a bell ringing in each, and a small kettle-drum being beaten in each. The drum-sticks were attached to the frame of the drum by hinges, and were worked by some unknown machinery.

‘Very fair business that,’ said George. ‘These are your church bells, Jack, ringing a regular peal. Two little hand bells, ladies and gentlemen. Next, the sighing and sobbing, with the cold breath.’

He opened another panel and disclosed a great pair of bellows pointed directly to the group of spectators. It began to heave up and down slowly with a noise like a hollow groaning, and the cold air was distinctly felt. ‘The sigh of the grave and the breath of the tomb,’ said George, again quoting from the ‘Narrative.’ ‘You will next, ladies and gentlemen, observe—ah! there it is’—for then the partition fell back—‘now the skeletons.’ Here they appeared, and they really seemed to dance as if they had no heart left for the work, and were quite ashamed of themselves. ‘Three of them—go and feel them, anybody—simple bones, hanging from the ceiling, out of which they fell, by strings. This is the grand procession where every . . . eh, Jack?’ He did not continue the extract from the ‘Narrative,’ because Laura was staring straight before her, an angry light in her eyes, and a flush upon her cheek.

‘Next,’ he went on, ‘we have the Ancestor himself.’ In fact, at that moment, the poor old doddering figure came out; he looked so palpably a stuffed doll in the machine, his face was so evidently a mask, his hair was so certainly white wool, his knees were so groggy with loss of sawdust, and his whole appearance was so inexpressibly moth-eaten, shabby, and woe-begone, that it was impossible to resist laughing at him. Everybody laughed, including

the Squire, though he felt sadly that the laugh was going to turn against himself. There were two exceptions: Laura did not laugh, she looked on in icy wrath and shame; and Jack did not laugh, because he felt that if he laughed at that moment, Laura would most certainly never forgive him. Therefore he preserved great solemnity.

This time it was not George Dalmahoy, but one of the bride's-maids who whispered so that all could hear, quoting from the 'Narrative: 'the sweet and gracious smile with which he turned his face towards us, and uplifting his venerable hands bestowed his benediction.' She was a pretty girl, who was said to have had designs upon Jack Dalmahoy, and has since married his cousin George. But for some reason or other Laura does not like her.

The poor old Ancestor disappeared in the opposite panel. 'He goes backwards and forwards,' said George; 'if we do this thing again, he will come out and cross over to the other side. The performance is about to conclude, and, ladies and gentlemen, I am sure that, in retiring from this caravan, you will confess that you have never before witnessed on so grand a scale so ingeniously constructed a piece of——CLOCKWORK.'

Laura, as soon as the door was opened, passed out the first, followed by Jack, whom, however, she pushed away roughly; then she went to her own room and no one saw her again that day, for, when the second dinner bell was rung, she sent down a message that she had a headache.

The Squire, too, with abashed countenance, sought solitude for a time. But at dinner he appeared jocund, in high spirits, even forced spirits, and after dinner proposed the health of Mr. George Dalmahoy, who, he said, had rid the house of a very unpleasant occupant—its ghost, and they were all extremely grateful to him. All the members of the family murmured their profound gratitude, and a certain bride's-maid, already mentioned, laughed a little laugh which everybody understood to be the equivalent of the immortal 'Fudge!'

And then George proposed another performance, but the Squire gently remarked that even of mechanical ghosts one might have enough. The irrepressible young man therefore spent the evening, until they began to dance, in explaining how he had discovered the secrets of the machinery, the spring wound by the door, the lubricating oil, and all the rest of the apparatus. All this greatly pleased the family, because it brought vividly home to them the mechanical genius of their great-grandfather, and destroyed their ghost and the ancestral glory of the House. It also pleased one of the bride's-maids—the one already alluded to.



*In the Apple Orchard.*

The next day's wedding was rather a dull affair. Somehow, the romance of the thing was gone. Ghost indeed ! The impudence of *parvenus* in assuming a ghost when there are already many really old families with no ghost at all, or at best the mere memory and shadow of a ghost. And the honeymoon would have been altogether a time of rebuke, but that Jack put his foot down and would hear no more nonsense about the ghost.

### In the Apple Orchard.

In the green orchard sitting,  
Of care and strife unwitting,  
Where, through the branches flitting,  
The broken sunbeams fall,  
Where, russet-red and yellow,  
The fruit shows ripe and mellow ;—  
Oh, time that had no fellow !  
Oh, sweet time to recall !

No thought was then of sorrow,  
No dread of the to-morrow,  
No seeking but to borrow  
Full bliss of the to-day ;  
As pure as the first mother,  
With no more doubts to smother,  
We sang to one another,  
In joyful childish play.

Alas, that such pure gladness  
Should ever yield to sadness,  
To passion's short-lived madness  
Or parting's stress and storm !  
That both for lads and lasses  
Life's bloom as swiftly passes  
As shadows o'er the grasses  
When autumn days were warm !

Yet youth is but the showing  
Of promise, like the blowing,  
With earnest of fruit's growing,  
Of blossoms red and white ;  
Sun-tried, by breezes shaken,  
The germ must wax and waken,  
Before by man is taken  
Therefrom a full delight.

Cheer up ! though heart-strings tighten  
At memories that brighten  
The bygone days, and lighten  
With hope thy mist of fears !  
Nor careless nor forgetful,  
Yet peaceful though regretful ;  
What boots repining fretful  
At flight of childish years ?

## Jebb's Mantelpiece.

THERE was very little in John Jebb, Esq., but what there was his friends objected to. While he was only moderately rich they hung aloof from him, but when he became a millionaire, of course that course of conduct became impossible. It is contrary to human nature to ignore a man who has twenty thousand a year, especially if he doesn't spend it. He had a few distant relatives, but there is always a chance of a man's not dying intestate, and John Jebb, although he was not old, was stout and had a short throat. For my own part, I have known men not nearly so rich and not more disagreeable. He was good-natured in doing things that gave him no trouble, and generous with his advice when it did not take money out of his pocket. In all matters of expenditure connected with himself he was more than liberal, he was lavish; and he had no hesitation in telling you so. I never knew anyone who shone so—with self-complacency—at the head of his dining-table. 'That champagne, my dear fellow, will not hurt you. It is not the sort of thing, I do assure you, that you get at home. As soon as I am assured of its being a good year I always secure the whole brand.' Jebb could not be said to be of a reverent habit of mind, but some things were sacred to him. For example, his madeira. He would speak of it with a hushed voice, as of the unforgotten dead. The bottle used to be brought out and exhibited before it was opened. 'Look at the cobwebs,' he would murmur plaintively, as though he were quoting—

Look at her garments, clinging like cerements.

He would watch it being placed in its cradle as a mother might hang over her dead baby; and he didn't like jokes about it any more than she would have done.

Young Binks of the Stock Exchange discovered that. I need not say—for otherwise he would not have been a guest of Jebb's—that he was a well-connected young fellow (son of Sir Gilbert Binks, member for Downshire), but he had fallen into bad habits in the city and become a wag.

'That last bottle of yours was corked, Jebb,' he had once the audacity to say.

'Corked! My madeira corked?' I really thought Jebb would have choked with indignation. He looked so red as well as

angry, that Binks, who had taken quite as much wine as was good for him, was sobered in an instant.

‘I only meant,’ he said with a sickly smile, ‘that it was corked before it was drawn.’

It was not a very good joke, but it cost Binks five hundred a year; for Jebb never gave him any business afterwards.

Cyrus Plush, the Royal Academician, though a skilled courtier, was once betrayed into a similar indiscretion. Jebb was a great patron of art, and was acknowledged by Plush, for reasons that were not inexplicable, to have a very good judgment in modern painting. His country residence, Fresco Castle—an historic mansion of great size and strength—was furnished in the most artistic manner, as all his visitors had cause to know. On the morning after your arrival, Jebb always took you over his ‘little place,’ as he humorously termed it, and eulogised everything to that extent that, had one not felt certain (from what one knew of Jebb’s habits of caution) that it was insured, it would have suggested arson. It is bad enough to be taken over a man’s stables after breakfast—why, oh why, does your host in the country always do this?—but an enforced inspection of a whole mansion, as if one was an auctioneer or appraiser, is a little too much. The ceilings at Fresco Castle are splendidly illustrated, and if you lay on your back on the floor might no doubt repay perusal, but nothing in the way of allegory can in my opinion compensate for a crick in the neck.

The nymphs and deities thus portrayed were hateful to Plush, who dates the true dawn of art no further back than the year in which he himself began to ‘flourish,’ and he showed great impatience during this terrible ordeal.

In the great drawing-room, where, overhead, Venus is apparently being ‘dipped’ in the sea in a very inadequate bathing-gown by Neptune, and other marine assistants, Jebb is always especially eloquent.

‘Now, you would never imagine, Mr. Plush, that that exquisite painting left the hand of Celinetto more than three centuries ago; the tints, the tones, the colours are as bright as ever.’

‘What a pity!’ exclaimed Plush.

He couldn’t resist it (‘canvas could hardly have stood it,’ as he afterwards said, ‘much less flesh and blood,’) but, just as in the case of poor Binks, Jebb never gave him another commission.

Perhaps it was his rupture with Plush that turned Jebb from painting to its sister art, but certainly of late years he has decidedly gone in more for sculpture, or, as Plush disdainfully terms it, ‘taken to marbles.’

A statue of himself, considerably over life size, adorns the great staircase at Fresco: he is represented making his great speech in Parliament (about shutting the window), and since it manifestly portrays a stout personage in the act of speaking, it is no wonder (though he doesn't like it) that strangers exclaim, 'Fox, of course.'

But what he prided himself most upon was the mantelpiece of Carrara marble, with a satyr's head in the middle of it, which he caused to be put up in the great hall. I don't know what it cost—of course he told me, but I have forgotten it—but it was something fabulous, nor was he the only person who had paid for it. What have I myself not suffered from Jebb's lectures upon the Carrara marbles!

To hear him talk, one would have thought that the block out of which that *chef-d'œuvre* was hewn had been endowed with moral virtues.

'It is virgin white, sir, without a stain. The marble of Pentelicus is nothing to it.'

Dr. Toft, the geologist, who lives in the neighbourhood, came over to inspect it; but his remarks were on the whole unfriendly to the mantelpiece. He said something in a depreciatory tone about its not being 'the fracture of loaf-sugar,' which Jebb resented exceedingly.

'Fractures and loaf-sugar!' he cried, pulling down his waistcoat and settling his cravat; 'I tell you it's equal to Parian.'

Jebb's mantelpiece was not only equal to Parian, but in one particular greatly superior to it, for it had the faculty, or at least the Satyr had, of altering its expression. If it had been Jebb's statue that did this, it would have been almost certain (taking the average of the human face divine) to have been an improvement, but in a mantelpiece one prefers monctony. I don't mean to say that the Satyr 'breathed and glowed' in the manner attributed to statuary by the poet, but it really did begin to show signs of animation.

Jebb himself, as was natural, since he was never tired of admiring the stately pile (it was of immense dimensions), was the first to discover this.

I happened to be at Fresco Castle when the conviction was brought home to him, and he did me the honour to confide it to me.

'My dear Jones,' said he one morning after breakfast, 'I want your opinion upon the most astounding circumstance that ever took place in the history of the universe.'

Then he took me into the great hall, locked all the doors, and

leading me up to the mantelpiece pointed with his finger to the very centre of it, and exclaimed in an awful voice, 'Look at that, Jones!' I thought he had gone out of his mind. There was nothing to be seen on the marble but the Satyr's head with his odious grin, and so I told him.

'Look at it again, Jones; I tell you it's alive!'

'Well,' said I gently, 'it is alive in one sense; we all know the line about the living marble, but that's metaphorical.'

'It's not a metaphor, it's reality,' whispered Jebb, hoarsely. 'I have watched it day by day and week by week, and I am convinced that marble perspires.'

'Gracious goodness! what does it do that for?'

'I don't know; I only know it does. Take the magnifying glass and look where my finger points.'

I looked, and it was true enough that in the Satyr's eye there was a place less white than its surroundings, apparently covered with a gentle exudation.

'Out, damp spot,' was the quotation that naturally rose to my lips, but in Jebb's perturbed state of mind I felt it would be cruel (and might be dangerous) to make light of his trouble. I accordingly murmured something about the effects of shadow.

'No, no,' he replied impatiently, 'I have tried to think that, of course, but it's nothing of the kind; that spot yonder grows darker and damper every morning.'

'Perhaps it's the dew,' I suggested; but I felt that the observation was scarcely worthy of serious attention. He took no notice of it, but only murmured, 'I'm sure it's something alive; I think I shall send for the doctor.'

This struck me as an excellent idea, and that what would be a great improvement on it would be to hint that he should bring a strait-waistcoat with him and a couple of keepers.

'You see, the doctor knows all about marbles,' he continued, 'and this may be a peculiarity of the Carrara. Perhaps it comes and goes.'

Then I perceived it was the geologist Dr. Toft, and not the physician, that my host had in his mind.

As I felt sure Toft would only laugh at him, I dissuaded Jebb from this course upon the ground that the doctor had been always hostile to the mantelpiece, and we decided to investigate the phenomenon for ourselves. Every morning we very literally 'sat down before it,' on two of the great high-backed hall chairs, and stared and stared at the damp spot till I hardly knew whether it was there or not. Sometimes I seemed to see it, and sometimes I



*'That spot grows darker and damper every morning.'*

didn't. It began to have almost as great a fascination for me as for Jebb himself.

One day a visitor called, and while admiring the mantelpiece, casually observed, 'It strikes me that just hereabouts' (and he pointed to 'the spot') it would be all the better for a little soap and water.'

Then we knew, of course, that we were not the victims of imagination.

From that moment, as if it felt it was discovered, the Carrara perspired visibly without making the least effort to conceal it; the spot grew and grew till it became the size of a man's hand and the colour of a very dirty hand. The Satyr, in fact, had an enormous black eye, as if he had made some satirical observation upon somebody which had not been taken in good part. The place moreover was no longer damp, but absolutely wet—dripping.

The remarks of visitors upon the subject grew so unpleasant that they were excluded from the great hall altogether, where Jebb and I often sat alone together on the high-backed chairs, watching proceedings. I confess that I was almost as much interested in the matter as he was, and I felt certain that something would come of it. The proverb *parturiunt montes*, &c., had no sarcasm for us, for even if it *should* be a mouse, that would surely be sufficiently surprising. However, though the Satyr's eye got darker and damper, nothing happened; and Jebb, growing impatient, determined to have the mystery solved at any cost. He sent privately for two workmen, and in our presence they took the mantelpiece down and broke it up.

At the back of the Satyr's eye was an enormous toad.

Of course I had heard of such creatures being found in trees and stones, but until that moment I had never believed it. He was alive, of course, much larger indeed than life and a great deal uglier. It was no wonder that any marble with a drop of blood in its veins—and it *had* veins—should have resented his presence. Never shall I forget him as he squatted all in a hunch upon the hearthstone, glaring at us with his magnificent eyes, and perspiring from every pore. 'I am out at last,' he seemed to be saying, 'but it was a long job.'

According to Professor Toft, to whom Jebb wrote these particulars, he must have been shut up there about twenty billions of years, since marble belongs to the palæozoic era. He had the impertinence to add that 'such discoveries had often been made by unscientific persons.'

To convince him of the *bona fides* of the whole transaction, we

sent him the toad for examination. Jebb put on his gold spectacles to read his reply.

‘This creature is of the *genus bufo*, and belongs to the amorous section of the *caducibranchiata*.’

‘I don’t think it can be amorous,’ I said; ‘it must have lived a very celibate life.’

The Professor, however, had written ‘anourous,’ which I believe means without a tail. He went on to say that the matter was explicable in only two ways, and I don’t know which was the most offensive to poor Jebb. One was that the toad had not been found *in situ* (i.e., that we were liars); the other, that the marble mantelpiece was not marble at all, but a ‘composition.’

JAMES PAYN.

### The White Stag.

THERE went out three hunters bold to the chase,  
They’d do for the stag that was white of face;  
So they sat them under the green fir-tree,  
Where came a strange dream to each of the three.

#### *The First.*

I have dreamed a dream that I beat the bush,  
Then rushed out the stag away, hoosh, hoosh!

#### *The Second.*

And then, as he sprang at the hounds’ chiff-chaff,  
I singed his hide with a ball, piff-paff!

#### *The Third.*

And I, as the stag on the ground I saw,  
Blew lustily into the horn, trara!

So there they lay still and prattled, the three,  
Whilst the white stag bounded across the lea;  
And ere the three hunters had seen him right,  
He was off and away o’er holt and height.

Hoosh, hoosh! Piff-paff! Trara!

FROM UHLAND.

## The Ballad of Mary of Egypt.

HONEY-SWEET MARY came down the street,  
With sandals of silver on both her feet,  
The saffron shawl that around her clung  
Over her shoulders was carelessly flung,  
And raven tresses that decked her head  
Were covered and bound with a kerchief red.

Mary of Egypt, as bright as flame!  
Of Alexandria the pride and shame;  
She hurried along in the purple light  
That promised the parched earth coolest night,  
Nor recked she of many a lover's cry  
That greeted her ear as she hastened by:—

‘Oh, enter, Mary; the wine is poured,  
And lamp-light glows on the rose-strewn board!  
The lutes are tuned, and the guests have met,  
And the softest couch for their queen is set;  
We need but thee with thy smile divine  
To brighten the lamps and to sweeten the wine!’

Never a whit would Mary stay,  
But hurriedly held on her darkling way;  
The clamour fell on a listless ear:  
With a look in her eyes of pain and fear,  
And clutching fingers, her way she went,  
As Hermes wings to her feet had lent.

As night sank down on the burning day  
The roaring city behind her lay;  
Grimy and dark showed each strait street  
That echoed the sound of her tinkling feet;  
Foul sights and smells upon every side,  
As the wild dog whined where it skulked to hide.

Now Mary stood where a low-browed porch  
Was shown by the light of a smoky torch,  
That scarcely showed where an iron ring  
Hung, clutched by the teeth of a grisly thing,  
That forth from the gloomy portal leaned,  
And glowered and grinned like a guarding fiend.

The ring was raised with a sudden clang  
Through hidden passage and vault that rang,  
The iron door swung groaning wide,  
As rusty hinges with labour cried ;  
Through that grim portal hath Mary passed,  
And the door hath clanged, and the die is cast.

Now onward, onward—light and shade  
By torch and shadowing curtain made ;  
But ever where torches smoke and flare  
Sweet Mary's shadow is rosy fair,  
And ever where shade lies dark and drear  
Sweet Mary shines like a spirit clear.

At last she came where a curtain rolled  
From roof to pavement many a fold,  
Black, with many a gold-hued shape,  
Gourd and crocodile, cat and ape !  
She paused as a voice cried, ' Enter free !  
What seeks blithe Mary to learn of me ? '

She stretched her fingers, the fold she raised,  
And stood by a lurid light half dazed,  
That showed where a dark-browed woman stood,  
Of beauty that never was sign of good ;  
Who smiled with a smile that a fiend had graced—  
She knew that the Jew-born witch she faced.

Long, black and thick, in many a braid  
Her elf-locks over her shoulders strayed,  
Her bright eyes shone with a yearning fire  
Of lonely, passionate, baulked desire,  
As she stood erect in her evil pride,  
With a beauty had fitted King Moloch's bride.

' Now welcome, bright Mary ! and happy the day  
That silver sandals hath brought to stray  
Where harbours the Jewess ; but what thy need ?  
Must laggard be quickened, or rival bleed ?  
What may poor Jezebel do for her sake  
Who charms all eyes like the king-crowned snake ?

' Have lips grown cold that were wont to kiss ?  
Is hint of ill in my lady's bliss ?  
Are Grecian purses empty and light,  
Or fearest thy beauty hath suffered some blight ? '  
' Oh, mother, oh, mother ! for no such toys  
Seeks Mary to Jezebel,—pleasure me cloys !

‘ Last night, as alone I lay, I dreamed ;  
I dreamt of a Lamb Whose life-blood streamed,  
And all wherever the life-drops fell  
Was fresher grass and a sweeter smell,  
And newer summer and flowers bright,  
And the sun shone clear through the darkling night !

‘ Now hard by that Lamb there kneeled a Maid,  
With stars of seven her head arrayed ;  
But seven sharp swords through her steadfast heart  
Were thrust, and she seemed as she felt their smart,  
Yet gazed on me with a smile full mild,  
And said, “ I have waited thee, wayward child ! ”

‘ Then smoke arose, and they passed away,  
As I weeping woke in the dawn of day ;  
Tell me, oh mother ! for thou hast skill,  
Say all, to prophesy, good or ill :—  
I charge thee by right of the ring that I bear,  
Thou read me my riddle, that free I may fare ! ’

The witch grew grim, as she stilly said,  
‘ Thou hast Solomon’s ring with the Name of dread ;  
I may not cross thee, thou Pride of Men,  
Mine eyes must veil to thine eager ken ;  
The rede of thy riddle in sooth thou shalt hear,  
But not in this dwelling—hast aught of fear ? ’

Then out laughed Mary, a laugh of scorn,  
‘ Of Pharaoh’s race, as they say, am I born !  
Then how should I fear what from hidden caves  
Is raised by one of our whilom slaves ?  
Fear not, good mother, to ply thy skill,  
Mary of Egypt will front thee still ! ’

Then said the witch, ‘ It is brave and well ;  
But not in this place may be wrought my spell.  
In Lebanon’s forest there lies a glade  
Where never the rays of the sunlight strayed,  
Only in shade of those cedars black  
Can Jezebel’s soul thy future track.

‘ With me this night thou shalt thither wend,  
And spirits the wisest their aid shall lend.  
What sayest thou now ? ’ And loud and clear  
Rang Mary’s cry on the listening ear :  
‘ Show me my vision, and gold is thine,  
Though paid it be at Aidoneus’ shrine ! ’

Then Jezebel flung on a brazier old  
Some certain herbs, and a smoke there rolled  
Around the pair, till they saw no more  
The chamber, nor those strong arms that bore  
Their quivering limbs, till a halt was made,  
And the thick smoke cleared in a darksome glade.

They stood where cedars in gloomy row  
Showed weird in the blaze of a fire below,  
A sorcerer's fire, that went and came  
With a sleepy smell and a rose-hued flame,  
While ravens around them flapped their wings,  
And the wet moss glistened with slimy things.

The witch she muttered, the witch she mowed,  
Brighter the flame of her fire it glowed ;  
The witch she gasped as a word of dread  
Painfully forth from her lips there sped :  
'Look up, brave Mary, and hear from me  
What shall the end of thy dreaming be !

'I see a blackness that mocketh night ;  
A cross—for a mighty Monarch dight ;  
A Maid who kisses a harlot's brow,  
And the wanton hastes at her feet to bow ;  
A twofold grave, and a white-stoled priest,  
And corpses twain, and a guarding beast.

'This of thy riddle my lips can tell ;  
I feel in my power some awesome spell,  
I may not say, and I may not know,  
If this foretokeneth weal or woe ;  
But—bow thy head till thy brow I lave  
With drops as healing as Lethe's wave !'

. . . . .

When Mary awoke at the dawn of day,  
Alone on her couch she weeping lay,  
A wondering fear in her childish mind,  
A strange new yearning some rest to find,  
That never might alter and never might faint  
Till the Pride of Egypt was crownèd saint.

## Lost !

‘It’s a fellow’s own fault if he’s poor—there are plenty of ways to make a fortune!’ said Mr. David Gwylt, son of the great iron-master, who, it is well known, had begun his career with a pickaxe in the very mine he afterwards owned. David Gwylt, junior, had been reared in luxury, and spent more money in a month than would have once kept his father for a twelvemonth, and led a far more idle life than princes, priding himself on the colossal fortune he was to inherit, and professing to be an oracle respecting money-making on the strength of it.

‘Name them,’ said I. ‘There may be a method to suit me.’

‘Being in the army, you’ll be well provided for one of these days,’ replied Gwylt, nodding significantly.

‘What is that?’ asked my friend Gerard Moryllyan, advancing from the side of Lady Caroline, his partner in a recent waltz, and whose bright eyes followed him as he leant on the back of Gwylt’s chair. Gerard came of high lineage, but was poor. He had unfortunately selected the profession of a barrister, hiding himself in remote chambers from which he emerged in the season, when his family connections came to town and sent him invitations; for he talked well, was a beautiful waltzer, tall, fair, and so handsome as to be a favourite with all the young ladies and marked ‘dangerous’ by their mothers. On the present occasion we were at Lady Hauteville’s house in Park Lane, on the night of her celebrated rose ball—a success which will be long remembered. All the cornices, &c., were marked out by roses.

‘Well,’ replied Gwylt, in his accustomed drawling tone, ‘there are lots of fortunes waiting for people who are sufficiently enterprising to take advantage of them. One of my favourite ideas is to drain the Essex marshes along the river by Tilbury; the loamy soil would be first-rate for cornfields.’

‘That would require capital,’ said Gerard.

‘Form a company, my friend.’

‘The advertising would be too expensive.’

‘Then there is an immense sum of money buried near the field of Culloden by Lochiel—it was to carry on the expenses for the Pretender—*that* has never been found yet; nor the treasure supposed to be stowed away in the vaults of Scarborough Castle by Charles I. I think it would be possible to find both of them—no capital required in either case.’

‘Only a little clairvoyance,’ cried I, ‘and when found the Government would pounce down upon them both.’

‘I have another scheme, cheap enough, and the most practicable of all, because it would depend on a fellow’s own exertions, provided he is a good diver and swimmer,’ continued Gwylt, sententiously. ‘The Goodwin Sands.’

‘The Goodwin Sands!’ and I, as well as other listeners, laughed aloud.

‘You may laugh, but what I am going to tell you is a fact. The bottom of the sea between those sands and the Deal and Dover coast is strewed with ingots, washed by the waves of three hundred years from the wrecked Spanish galleons. I found one myself at Walmer.’

We all pricked up our ears at this information and drew nearer to the narrator, for it sounded promising.

‘Yes,’ he said, ‘it’s a fact, and I have it at home—a wedge of gold encrusted with shells and sand. Take my word for it, there are plenty more where that came from.’

‘At what part of the beach did you pick it up?’ asked Gerard, who had turned rather pale.

‘Nearly opposite Walmer Castle, at the water’s edge, thrown up at my feet. There’s a fortune of millions lying there, my dear fellow—only to be dived for.’

‘That sounds well,’ said Gerard, musing. ‘Yes, it might be done. The Government would pay handsomely for it.’

Lady Caroline was seated within hearing of the conversation, at first listening carelessly, but at Gerard’s words she gazed at him anxiously and motioned to him with her fan, at which he resumed his seat beside her. ‘You are not serious,’ she said. ‘Think of the number of times it would be necessary to dive before anything could be found. Then the danger of entanglement amongst the *débris* of wreckage’—here she shuddered. ‘Blood-vessels are sometimes broken——’

‘That seldom occurs with a good apparatus, and the latest improvements enable a diver to walk about the bottom of the sea easily and safely,’ replied Gerard.

‘I pity those poor men whose livelihood depends upon it, but should be sorry if any friend of mine were to attempt it *en amateur*—but this is our dance,’ as the band played ‘Dream Faces.’

‘Our last dance this season,’ said Gerard, as he encircled her slender waist with his arm. He and Lady Caroline were the handsomest young people in the room; it was a pleasure to see them dancing together, and many eyes followed their movements

besides mine; Lady Frocester looking very cross as she watched her lovely daughter evidently carrying on a conversation with her partner while dancing. Poor Lady Caroline would doubtless get a lecture before many hours had passed. The musicians sang alternately portions of the waltz they played:

Sweet dream faces, passing to and fro,  
Bring back to mem'ry days of long ago,  
Murmuring gently through a mist of pain,  
'Hope on, dear loved one; we shall meet again.'

Lady Caroline and Gerard stopped to rest very near to me, under a decoration of blush roses, which her sweet face rivalled in pureness and delicacy.

'And *we* shall meet again, although this is our last meeting for some months, as you will be leaving for Germany on Saturday,' said he. 'When do you return?'

'We shall be back at Wrexham for Christmas; that is all I can say for certain. You will, of course, be at Sir John Desborough's as usual?'

'I hope so, provided my cousin has his customary New Year's ball. Will you give me the first dance?'

'Certainly; but I think we have danced enough for to-night. I see my mother telegraphing to me,' and the young lady gave a little involuntary sigh. 'Gerard, before we part, promise me solemnly not to entertain that mad idea—that wild project. I shall always detest Mr. Gwylt for proposing it.'

Gerard laughed. 'I will make no rash promises, as I should like to investigate the spot; there would be no danger, for I am an amphibious animal and can swim like a fish. If available treasure really lies there, the Government might place it in my hands to dredge up.'

'Quick! promise me,' said Lady Caroline.

'I promise to claim you for the first dance at my cousin Desborough's ball.'

'You know I do not mean *that*——Yes, mother, I am coming,' to Lady Frocester, who sailed up to them with a very decided frown on her countenance.

'Allow me to see you to the carriage,' said Gerard. Not twenty mothers' black brows would prevent him from a last look, a last word, the last touch of the hand of her he loved.

Gerard did not return to the ballroom, and I had no opportunity of meeting him again, for the season ended and we all migrated in different directions. Late in the autumn I heard a rumour that Lady Caroline was affianced to a wealthy nobleman,

older than her own father. This report I did not believe, being convinced that a strong attachment existed between her and my old acquaintance, and she was one of those girls whom neither titles nor wealth would win for their sake alone. If she threw in her lot with a poor man, she would identify herself with him and bear poverty bravely. Engaged with military duties, the remembrance of the ball in Park Lane and the conversation I had heard passed from my mind; it would probably have been forgotten for ever had not a strange incident recalled it. At the commencement of December my battalion changed its quarters, from Chelsea to Deal—a change the officers deplored (for we were given to running the gauntlet of the theatres), to a dull little town, its only excitement the lifeboat putting out in stormy weather; it was rather trying.

A ship, laden with pine, from Norway, had got on the Goodwins, which was a stirring incident, her masts visibly sinking lower every day; and it was interesting to watch the proceedings of the steam-tugs to bring her off. One bleak afternoon I had strolled along the beach, cigar in mouth, rather farther than usual, and found myself in a part where patches of grass and scrub extended over a large expanse of it, some distance from the bathing-house, and where the machines are hauled up. It was late, and the weather stormy, the black masses of cloud driving along in fantastic shapes; the sea was lead colour, the waves rising and breaking on the shingle with a crash and a roar. There was something so desolate and picture-like in the scene, that I stood in the little winding-path I was treading to admire its wildness. All, as far as I could see in the increasing gloom, was a solitude, and I believed myself the only living being on the spot. All at once there was a movement near one of the bushes; a figure emerged, walking straight towards the sea—a tall figure, strangely formed, with an unnaturally large head—was it a helmet? For a minute he stood still between me and the waves, which defined his outline more plainly, and it resembled the man who some years ago used to be at the vanished Polytechnic, a great attraction to me in my juvenile days. What was this person about to do? I watched him curiously. After remaining motionless for a minute or two, with his head a little drooping, he walked deliberately to the water's edge, where the waves broke in a line of white foam on the beach, entered the dark wall of advancing billows, and disappeared!

I gazed with dismay, astonished, and not a little alarmed. Was I witnessing a suicide? Hurrying to the spot, I anxiously examined the heavy sea, expecting to have a lifeless body cast up

at my feet. I walked along the shore keenly scrutinising the waves. The tide was coming in, and if the man had reappeared I do not think I could have avoided seeing him—but he never came. The clock at Walmer Castle struck five, and I returned to my quarters, very uneasy in my mind.

I related the occurrence to my brother officers at dinner; they declared it to have been an hallucination caused by the fantastic shapes of the shrubs, seen in the gloaming. I did not contradict them, although I was convinced that I was *not* under an optical delusion, for I had seen the rather tall figure distinctly as it stood motionless, the outline clearly defined against the waves, and then slowly walk into the sea, as if into its native element.

The next morning I strolled over the same ground as on the preceding afternoon, for, if a suicide, something might have transpired concerning it. The sky was leaden and the sea ran high, the waves crested with white foam, though the wind had subsided. I wandered upon the waste spot, with its patches of scrub or coarse grass, and having here and there pools of water caused by the recent heavy rains. Although desolate, in the light of morning it appeared less dreary; and Walmer Castle with its groups of trees was a pleasant object in the scene. A few vessels were out in mid-channel, and the steam-tugs were hard at work with the Norwegian. There was not a trace of the man I had seen the preceding evening. I went to the clump of bushes from behind which he had emerged, examining the ground, a muddy soil, which would have retained the impression of footprints; but it was untrodden, not a blade of grass was bent, while, on the other hand, my own footprints, as I had hurried about in the twilight, were plainly discernible. Were my friends right? Had my eyes deceived me, and imagination played me this trick? The idea made me uncomfortable; I did not wish to be so strongly endowed, and I walked back again in a brown study.

Old Kenwood, an ex-Deal boatman, whose duty it was to attend a capstan placed on that part of the beach, was smoking his pipe, and watching the operations of the tugs through his little telescope. He touched his cap as I advanced.

‘Mornin’, sir; they’re a-getting her off’—indicating the Norwegian—‘and a good thing too, for she’s sunk two feet deeper in the night. It’s a pity the weather is so rough, though it doesn’t blow like it did yesterday.’

‘It was a gale,’ said I. ‘I walked down as far as the Castle. By-the-by, Kenwood, who is it that goes diving or swimming there in the dusk?’

Old Ken stared at me aghast; the pipe dropped from his mouth, as he opened it in astonishment.

‘What was he like, sir?’

‘Tall,’ replied I, ‘and appeared to wear a helmet.’

‘Just so,’ observed Ken.

‘He looked clumsy, and really it seemed incredible to suppose him a diver, though he walked into the sea.’

‘Just so,’ said Kenwood again, nodding his head.

‘You appear to know him. Who is he? What is he doing?’

‘Who he is I can’t tell you, nor what he is a-doing of, for that there figger’s a ghost!’

‘Nonsense!’ cried I, ‘there are no such things.’

‘It’s all very fine for folks to say that, what’s never seen them. I allays sed so myself till this onaccountable appearance, and I’ve pertickler reasons for knowing it’s a ghost,’ and Kenwood uttered a groan.

‘Then you’ve seen it yourself?’ said I.

‘True, sir; many times in dark, stormy weather he comes out of the sea or he walks into it. Ah! it’s a sad look-out!’

‘What is, Ken?’

‘This here, sir. It’s a trial to come upon me in my old age, for as I’m allays about that there beach I often sees him. My pardner’s seed him once.’

Then my imagination had not tricked me. My curiosity was, however, aroused, and it appeared to me as if old Ken knew more about it than he chose to say. I quietly slipped a florin into his brown, horny hand.

‘Tell me all you know,’ said I.

‘Come along this way, sir, and I’ll spin you a queer yarn. I’ve told it to nobody yet—for reasons, as you’ll see.’

The old fellow led me to the bathing machines, hauled up on the higher beach for the winter, under the shelter of which was a bench, where we seated ourselves. Kenwood looked round to see if there was anybody within earshot; excepting a few strollers along the roadway and boys playing at the water’s edge, we had the spot to ourselves. Ken put his pipe in his pocket and shook his head sorrowfully, evidently reluctant to begin his tale.

‘One morning, last October, as I was a-sittin’ here, a gent comes up to me, axing a mort of questions about the tides and the Goodwins, which I could answer well enough, sir, for I was a Deal pilot for many a year, and know the waters and soundin’s by heart as far as the South Sands head light. No channel’s more dangerous than this here British Channel; it’s a’most all sands; there’s the West and East Girders, Margate Sands, Long Sands,

Sunk Sands, and them Goodwins. Then the soundin's are alarm-in'—eleven fathoms here, and close agin it one fathom. "No wonder the Spanish Armada went to destruction," says he. "Ay, ay," says I, "that was in Queen Elizabeth's time." "Yes," says he, "upwards of sixty large and thirty small vessels was lost—the bottom of the sea herèabouts must be strewn with their fragments. Do you ever come across anything washed up by the waves?" says he. Then I told him as how gold coins had been found, and at low water in summer-time I've seen hulks of vessels far down in the water, mayhap Spanish vessels, or maybe Indiamen, for a sight of 'em laden with gold-dust have gone down off here. "Well," says he, "I'm a diver, and I want you to row me out that I may dive and see for myself. I want to report to the Government. There's a mine of wealth under that sea, and I want them to put it in my hands to dredge it up." "Lor' bless you," says I, "it's too late in the year for diving; the waters are heavy, and the undercurrent strong; July would be your time." "Yes," says he, "for business operations; but I only want to inspect." He wouldn't take no for his answer, though I was flat agin it, and I am such a fool I let him parlaver me over.'

'Do you mean to say you rowed him out?'

'To my sorrow. I fetched my mate, who is a younger man nor me; he giv' us a suvrin apiece, and put on his diver's dress, that he carried in a black bag all ready. The clothes he took off he put in it, and hid them in the clump of bushes where you saw the figger yesterday. We rowed him to where I'd seen the vessels, as near as I remembered. It was a fine hazy mornin', but though the water looked calmish, there was a heavy sea a-running out. I felt very dubious about the business, but the gent was in high sperets, and down he went, well enough. It was twelve fathom, and he signalled from the bottom "all right"—a vessel was there. Line signals had been arranged, d'ye see? After he had been down twelve minutes we signalled to him, but no answer came. Presently, to our horror, we sees the life-line a-floatin' on the top of the waves! Then we knew it was all over. He *never* came up!' concluded the old fellow solemnly.

'What was he like?' I asked, my thoughts reverting to Gerard.

'A tall, fair, handsome young man, sir.'

My heart sank—it was just his description. Could he have been so mad as to act on Gwylt's suggestion?

'Whether he got entangled in the wreckage or had a fit, Heaven above us only knows,' continued Kenwood. 'We never found out who he was. I have his bag at home with his clothes

in it—there's no name on any on 'em, no letters. He had three suvrins, a lot of silver, and a return ticket for London Bridge—there they are, untouched, sir. Bless you, sir, whoever he is he's not missed; we've looked in the papers and he's not been advertised for.'

This also strengthened my supposition that the unfortunate young man was my old schoolfellow, as he had no very near relatives in London. His mother was dead; his father, a general officer, was in Ceylon; the one person most interested in his well-being was Lady Caroline. She, poor girl, was powerless, as his suit was disapproved by her parents; besides, she and they were still at Berlin. It appeared to me that, knowing what I did, I was the proper person to investigate the matter. The strangeness of the affair weighed upon my mind, and I frequented the beach early and late to obtain if possible another sight of the mysterious diver, without success. I then ran up to town. On the door of Gerard's chambers at the Temple a card was affixed, with 'Absent' written upon it. His neighbours (brother barristers) informed me that he had been away about seven weeks, and that it was nothing unusual, as he was given to short trips on the Continent and walking tours. I found out his laundress, who also appeared perfectly undisturbed at his absence, merely remarking that Mr. Moryllyan was making a long stay this time; but he had left her his key, and she had sorted all the letters as they arrived on his table, and had everything in readiness for his return. If these people, who were acquainted with his habits, were easy concerning him, why should I trouble myself? Yet I *could* not resist a conviction that something was wrong, and very glad I felt when, obtaining leave of absence, I started on New Year's Day for the Desboroughs' annual ball at Wrexham. This was always a grand affair. Wrexham Court was thrown open, and spacious temporary stables erected for the accommodation of the horses and equipages of the county families coming from a distance. The old mansion was well adapted for a *fête* on a large scale; it seemed to possess endless rooms, as it had been added to from time to time. The ballroom was built out, and ran the whole length of the building. It had its balcony for the musicians, and in fact all the arrangements were perfected successfully by good taste, backed by Sir John Desborough's very ample fortune.

As I anticipated, Lady Frocester and her fair daughters were in the ballroom; Lady Caroline, the eldest and the loveliest, surrounded as usual by a crowd of admirers, all anxious to insert their names in her tablet. She greeted me with unaffected pleasure, but when, in my turn, I asked for the favour of a dance,

she assured me that her list was filled up. I was disappointed, for I wished to ascertain whether or not she had heard of Gerard recently.

‘Will you grant me a promenade round the room then, Lady Caroline?’ said I, ‘for I wish to know something of your Berlin experiences.’

‘My experience is that it is very cold in winter-time,’ she replied, acceding to my request, and placing her hand within my arm. ‘I am truly glad to return home again—we only came back a fortnight ago.’

While she walked with me I noted she was scanning the groups of guests as they entered the doors. The musicians had taken their places in the gallery, and were indulging in preparatory flourishes on their instruments.

‘Have you seen Gerard Moryllyan?’ she inquired at length. ‘I promised him the first dance, and he does not appear to be here.’

‘No,’ I replied, and then stopped. How could I tell this charming young girl the fears I entertained concerning her lover?—for such he was, though unacknowledged. The band struck up delightfully, the dancers forming for the opening quadrille.

‘How very odd,’ continued the young lady, ‘that Gerard is not here to claim me! I never knew him break a promise before—— Why—there he is!’ as she spoke indicating with her bouquet an arched entrance to a lobby, leading from the ballroom to the house, by which the musicians had entered. Orange trees had been brought from the conservatories for this occasion to adorn it; in the shadow of these I saw Gerard standing motionless.

‘Will you take me to him?’ said Lady Caroline, ‘for he does not see me, Captain Wardlaw.’

Her bright face was flushed with pleasure. Skirting the dancers, I led her to the lobby. Gerard still stood there, under the branches of a fine orange tree, but did not appear to note our entrance.

‘Gerard—dear Gerard!’ cried Lady Caroline, quitting my arm and advancing with outstretched hand. ‘Are you ill?—how white you look!’

As she spoke he faded from our sight, exactly the same as a rainbow softly merges into the cloud—he was gone!

‘What does this mean?’ gasped Lady Caroline, turning a horror-stricken face towards me.

I could not speak. On the ground, a flooring of white marble, at the very spot where he had stood, lay a dark object. The young lady stooped and picked it up—it was a long strand of seaweed, to which adhered small shells; it was dripping with sea-

water, and a cold wind like a breath from the sea played round us.

‘Ah!’ cried Lady Caroline, letting it drop from her hand, ‘I know now—he is *dead*! Oh, Gerard, Gerard!’ She tottered, and would have fallen had I not caught her—she had fainted.

It was even so; Gerard Moryllyan never returned. Inquiries were instituted without success; no particulars save those just related ever transpired.

JESSIE MACLEOD.

## A Ghost Story without an End.

Now, I don't think there is a touch of jealousy in my nature—a jealous woman has always been my pet abomination—but I must confess that, just for one moment, I had a strange choking sensation in my throat when I saw my husband's face become suddenly distorted by emotion at a mere passing glance from a pretty woman. Pretty she undoubtedly was, nay, almost lovely, with large blue eyes, and golden hair that clustered around her head in little curls: there was an air of elegance, too, in her dress and equipage, that denoted both wealth and refinement. She bowed to my husband as she drove past, but it was only the greeting of a chance acquaintance: he, however, as if unable to take his eyes from her, leaned over the balcony, and followed the movements of her carriage with a painfully eager glance until the trees hid it from view.

Even then he seemed utterly oblivious of my presence, but stood by my side with that same white, startled expression on his face, that had first attracted my attention. Anything is better than suspense. I laid my hand upon his arm. 'Herbert, who is she? Why, why——' I could say no more, my voice failed me.

He turned quickly round. 'Why, Alice, what is the matter?' he inquired anxiously.

'Who is she?' I repeated,—'the lady in that carriage with the foreign-looking man?'

'The Countess de Lissa,' he replied quietly, almost sadly. 'She was Annie Lisle, a cousin of the Beaumonts.'

It was a name I had never heard.

'Do you know her well?'

'I never spoke to her in my life.'

'Then why——'

'Oh, I know what you mean. It is only an old piece of folly, but I cannot shake it off. We won't talk about it now, for it is a rather painful subject. Let us go out into the sunshine.'

But if he imagined I was going to be satisfied with that, he was very much mistaken. I saw it was no good pressing the point just then; I must wait for a better opportunity. It was not long in coming. We were making our way slowly down south, (we were on our honeymoon), and arrived at Mentone.

As soon as table d'hôte was over, we established ourselves in our

little private sitting-room, for there was no chance of going out, as it was raining furiously. For some time I went on diligently making cigarettes, but at length, when my pile was greater than any man could smoke in a month, I began my attack with what I regarded as no inconsiderable amount of skill. A shade of annoyance passed over Herbert's countenance when he became aware of the turn the conversation was taking; but as he looked down into my eager face, his expression changed. He said gently :

‘ Alice, what a thorough woman you are! I have been on the point of telling you that story half-a-dozen times, only I never care very much to talk about it. You see, I don't understand it, and I suppose now, I never shall.’

Here Herbert hesitated, and there was a touch of embarrassment in his manner when, after a pause, he began to speak; and his face had a grave, troubled look which I had never seen there before.

‘ A year ago last September,’ he began, ‘ I went into Pembroke-shire to spend a few days with the Beaumonts. It was the first time I had been at Plas Beaumont, and as I had come straight through from London, and it was nearly seven when I arrived, I went to my room at once. The Plas was originally an old farmhouse, which has been added to and altered by each successive generation until it has become a good-sized, comfortable country residence. I remember, as we drove up the avenue, being struck by the extraordinary length of the building; although only two stories high, it is as long as half a dozen ordinary houses put together.

‘ My room was at the front of the house, at the top of the staircase that leads out of the hall. There was nothing about it to attract any special attention; I know half a dozen country houses that have just such rooms. The old carved-oak wainscot was rather quaint, but the bed and furniture were quite modern. Opposite the door leading from the staircase was a large window running the whole length of the room; at right angles to this window, and close to it, was another door, with a heavy curtain partially covering it. All this I had time to observe whilst dressing, for the servant had told me that dinner was not until a quarter to eight.

‘ It was just half-past seven when I had finished dressing, and my hand was already on the door handle, when—now, Alice, I can only tell you what I saw; even for myself I can find no explanation—the smaller door was suddenly burst open, and a tall, dark man, evidently a foreigner, sprang in, seized me by the arm; even now I can feel the gripe of his fingers. He said some-

thing, but the only words I could distinguish were, "Help! For God's sake, help!" He almost dragged me after him through a room into a passage, through another room, down a long corridor, and only stopped when we were in front of the door of the end room of the house. Before he opened this door, he turned and looked at me. I saw his face as clearly as I see yours at this moment. He was a handsome man, with clear, well-cut features, black hair, and a sword cut above the left eyebrow. He had a tall, lithe figure, and even in my fright, I was struck by his air of distinction.

'We stood there looking at each other for perhaps half a minute, which to me seemed an eternity; then my companion opened the door and led me into a bedroom, smaller and more old-fashioned than the one that had been given to me, but very like it. It had the same long, low window, but, instead of my little iron bed, there was a large old four-poster, that must have been made centuries before, hung with yellow chintz, which seemed to be covered with little, black, dancing figures.

'The man, still holding me by the arm, led me up to the bed. On it, stretched full length, was lying a woman, or rather a girl, for she did not look more than one- or two-and-twenty. She was in evening dress, and around her neck there was a curiously wrought old mosaic necklace. At this moment, as I think of her, I see her again as clearly as I saw her that night. She was a beautiful woman, one that, in any case, it would not have been easy to forget, but I had never seen her before. As I looked at her—she was in the full glare of the setting sun—I noticed that there was a thin red line running around her neck, as if it had been cut with some sharp instrument, and blood was slowly oozing out on one side, and running down the pillow. Then, for the first time, I noticed that the man, who was standing by my side, held a long pointed knife in his hand, and it was blood-stained. I sprang forward to raise the woman——

'The next thing I remember was, that I was standing with my hand upon the handle of my bedroom door, ready to go down to dinner.'

Beads of perspiration were standing on my husband's brow when he finished speaking.

'My dear Herbert, you surely did not let that trouble you? You were tired—it is an awful journey to Pembroke. You must have had some sort of a fit, perhaps a touch of sunstroke?' and I strove to drive away my husband's gloom, for his ghastly paleness frightened me.

He looked dreamily out of the window.

‘Yes, yes, that is what I said to myself. I did not like it, even then, for it is not pleasant to have one’s imagination playing such tricks; but I was sure it was only imagination, particularly as I found that the little door was bolted on my side and locked on the other. I shook myself together and went down into the drawing-room. There were several people staying in the house; some few were old friends of mine, but most of them were strangers. Dinner was late, for Mr. Beaumont and some of the men had been out shooting on the moors. I was sitting on the sofa, talking to Mrs. Beaumont, when, just as the gong was sounding, a tall, beautiful girl came into the room, and as she passed, turned to speak to Mrs. Beaumont.

‘For a moment my heart ceased beating. She was the woman whom I had seen that night, lying on the bed with her throat cut. It was the same form, the same little golden curls, and the same quaint old mosaic necklace was around her neck; and, standing not a yard behind her, was the tall dark Creole, whom I had last seen with a blood-stained knife in his hand.

‘The room seemed to spin round; I could only gaze helplessly at the girl. Mrs. Beaumont must have thought that I was mad. Mechanically I listened whilst she asked if I felt ill, and assured me that I should kill myself if I did not take more rest.

‘At length I recovered myself sufficiently to ask who the lady with the golden curls was.

‘“That tall girl in white? She is Annie Lisle, a niece of Mr. Beaumont’s. Is she not pretty? And that tall dark man that came in with her is her *fiancé*, the Count de Lissa. They are to be married next month.”’

‘The next day I told Mrs. Beaumont all that I had seen, or dreamed. She listened to me very patiently, but smiled, and assured me that I had been working too hard, and must stay and let them nurse me. With infinite trouble I persuaded her to come to my room and unlock the side door. As soon as I entered the room into which it opened, I recognised it, and at once, without a moment’s hesitation, led the way through the second room, the passage, and the corridor just as the man had taken me the night before. I knew every step of the way, and only stopped when we reached the door of the room where I had seen the woman lying. Here Mrs. Beaumont held me back. I noticed that although she still tried to smile, she seemed anxious and disturbed. She knocked at the door, and then, as no answer came, we went in. It was the room I had been in the night before. I recognised it at once. It was impossible to mistake that large old-fashioned four-post bed; I could have sworn to the very pattern of the hangings.

‘And this was Annie Lisle’s room, Mrs. Beaumont told me.

‘What was to be done? Annie Lisle was a penniless girl, and the Count de Lissa was a brilliant *parti*, and a man of irreproachable character. Mrs. Beaumont argued that it would be little short of cruelty to let the story be known.

‘I left the house that night, and the marriage took place the next month.

‘I am waiting for the sequel.’

LESLIE ETHRIDGE.

## A Psychological Experiment.

But since I must fix on black eyes or blue,  
Quickly make up my mind 'twixt a Grace or a Muse,  
Prithee, Venus, assist me which course to pursue  
Where Paris himself would be puzzled to choose.

THOUGHTS, something in the strain of the above lines of Alaric Watts, occupied the mind of Mark Darrel as he paced the beach at Paignton. Now and then he stopped and drew patterns on the sand with his stick; patterns that had no meaning unless they represented the intricacies of his mind. He did not even notice some one coming towards him, and started when a hand was laid on his shoulder.

‘Marshall, you here!’ was his exclamation, when turning, he faced a thin haggard-looking man. ‘Have you come for health or dissipation?’

‘Both, as you know, are matters of perfect indifference to me,’ Ernest Marshall answered with a smile. ‘What are you doing, silent by the shores of the loud-sounding sea—so engrossed in thought that you start when I touch you?’

‘I was thinking very hard.’

‘How unusual!’ said Marshall.

‘I can tell you that it is very tough work when a fellow isn’t given to thinking all day and all night like you. And I’ve got to choose a wife, which you, lucky fellow! are determined never to do.’

‘Who is the young lady?’

‘That,’ exclaimed Mark, ‘is just what I can’t decide. My uncle has announced his wish that I should marry and settle. He has fixed his choice on two Miss Rivers, co-heiresses, and says I may marry either of them. But they’re both nice girls, and I can’t decide.’

‘You are in love with neither; you can’t marry them both, and you won’t go away. Good heavens! what slavery to an old man and his money!’

‘I like my uncle; I’ve been brought up as his heir; it’s no slavery,’ Mark answered laughing. ‘But those girls—I can’t decide between them. I have tried to see whether when with Christine I am not miserable without Leonora; or whether I don’t like Leonora far less than Christine. But I can’t discern any difference in my feelings. I believe I prefer both to be together,

then I can look at Christine and talk to Leonora. Christine is the pretty one; but then she is such a little goose. Leonora really is clever and has lots to say; but I hate ugly women. I'm like the prince in the fairy tale, only unfortunately I haven't the power of imparting my wisdom to anyone, and I doubt if they'd gain much if I could. If Christine only had Leonora's wits, she would be perfect.'

'Leonora's soul in Christine's body,' said Marshall reflectively, in his turn drawing on the sand.

'I said Leonora's wits,' corrected Mark. 'I don't care twopence about their souls.'

'The soul,' said Marshall, 'is the seat of all wit and learning. The body is merely the case in which it is contained, and its being there is merely an accident over which many souls have no control. I believe, Mark, that I could help you in this matter.'

'I wish you would,' Darrel exclaimed. 'My uncle asks me every day when I mean to marry, and I'm sure I don't know.'

'You know that, through a long course of studies, I possess powers undeveloped in most men?'

'I've sometimes seen you do awfully queer things,' Mark replied, scarcely impressed by the gravity of his friend's manner.

'Let me have an opportunity of mesmerizing these two young ladies, and we will see whether it is not possible better to regulate the balance of wit and beauty.'

'I expect they would jump at the notion of being mesmerized,' said Mark. 'But you will not hurt them?'

'Trust me, and be silent about this conversation,' answered Marshall; and then, with a dignified air, strode away over the sands. 'It will be a difficult, risky attempt,' he thought as he went. 'But, if successful, what power it will assure me in the future!'

Meanwhile Mark turned his steps towards the home of the Miss—Rivers.

The sisters were sitting in the drawing-room where the passion flower that grew over the verandah darkened the windows. Leonora, the elder, was working. She hardly deserved Mark's epithet of ugly; some people would have thought that broad brow with the dark hair combed away from it and the regular features handsome. But then, Christine! She was sitting in a low chair, her hands clasped behind her head, her feet crossed in an attitude of idle grace. Like her sister's her eyes were grey, with dark brows and lashes; but her hair was of that peculiar brown which ends in golden tips, and, cut short, framed her face like a nimbus. Her complexion was of the pink and white of a peach, and the red lips had a somewhat childish pout. Nature had rounded off

her figure like that of a marble statue; while Leonora's worst fault was that of being somewhat angular. For some time they had been silent, Christine almost asleep; now she roused herself to say:

'There is Mr. Darrel, I know his ring.'

Leonora thrust her work away with a little air of agitation like one anxious to appear at her best. Christine never stirred. She only held out a languid hand when Mark entered the room, and asked him if it was not 'horribly hot.' He thought how pretty she looked while addressing his conversation to Leonora. From Christine no one expected conversation. Mark would have liked to be a Turk and marry both of them—Christine for ornament, Leonora for all practical purposes.

His errand was to propose that Ernest Marshall should mesmerize the sisters, and it was not long before he introduced the subject.

'What fun!' said Christine, rousing herself.

'How very interesting,' said Leonora. 'Does your friend study occult science, Mr. Darrel? I've lately been reading a little about it, and it seems quite fascinating.'

'I fancy Marshall knows a lot about such things. But they are mysteries, you know. One must not make many inquiries.'

'Can he tell fortunes?' asked Christine.

Darrel laughed. 'You'd better ask him,' he said, 'I don't know.'

'Fortune-telling is the lowest form of spiritualism,' remarked Leonora.

'But it is far the most interesting,' urged Christine. 'He will not hurt us, will he, Mr. Darrel?'

'I shall be here to protect you,' he gallantly answered.

And the *séance* was fixed for the next evening, when the elders of the family dined out, but the presence of some juvenile cousins would ensure all propriety.

A decided nervousness showed itself in the demeanour of Mr. Marshall and the two girls the next evening. Mark, ignorant of what momentous events were to take place, alone retained his natural mood, and made himself thoroughly agreeable to the young cousins invited to meet them. Dinner over, there was no lingering of the gentlemen in the dining-room, they followed the girls, and talked until the gathering twilight threw the whole drawing-room into shadow.

'This is getting most eerie,' one of the girls remarked, when Marshall, rising, asked Leonora whether she was ready for the ceremony.

'My intention is,' he said, 'to mesmerize you two sisters together, that your souls may journey into space side by side.'

‘I’m glad no one is going to mesmerize me,’ quoth a cousin, sitting as near as possible to the half-open window. And so nervous was she that, as soon as Marshall’s passes had thrown Leonora into sleep, she hurried away into the garden, taking her sister with her.

‘They are no loss,’ the mesmerist whispered, as slowly Christine’s beautiful face sank slumbering against the crimson velvet of the chair. In deep unconsciousness the two sisters lay before the young men, and Ernest Marshall, turning to his friend, said :

‘I am going, by power of will, to make you see what I can see.’

And dimly in the twilight Mark could discern two pale forms floating above the sisters. That one over the head of Leonora seemed farthest away, but a thin silver thread seemed to attach each of those shining beings to its companion girl.

‘Those,’ explained Marshall, ‘are the higher powers that inhabit every human body—in common language they are called the souls. Leonora’s, you see, is prone to take higher flights into the realms of space than her sister’s. Christine’s is the more material. Now, let me effect the change you so desired, and transfer Leonora’s soul into Christine’s body.’

Quickly bending forward he loosened first one silver cord, then the other. One instant he held the two in his hands, and during that moment the life seemed to ebb away from the unconscious forms before him. Mark trembled; had this mad experiment killed both the girls? He shut his eyes, to reopen them and see Marshall making those passes that were to arouse the girls from their mesmeric sleep.

‘You doubted my powers,’ he said to Mark. ‘But I have done what you wished. I only entreat that you will be silent.’

Christine first revived.

‘Ah, how strange!’ she said, passing her hand over her eyes. ‘I seem to have seen so much, and yet can remember none of it.’

‘What passes in trances is seldom remembered,’ Marshall told her.

‘Isn’t it? How tiresome!’ exclaimed Leonora, who now awoke to things mundane. And in the gathering twilight Mark fancied he saw her pout. Christine often pouted, it suited her red lips very well, but, somehow, it was not becoming to Leonora.

Ernest made some brief inventions to satisfy the sisters’ curiosity as to what had passed during their trance. The cousins re-entered, and Christine energetically cried out for lights.

‘I thought you hated sitting in the dark, Leonora?’ she said.

‘Moving about is such a lot of trouble,’ answered the elder

sister. And when the lights were brought in Mark saw that she was reclining in almost the same attitude Christine was wont to adopt, with hands clasped behind her head and feet crossed together. The position made her seem marvellously angular.

But Mark was not inclined to pay any heed to Leonora. His attentions were directed towards Christine, now possessing both a talented soul and attractive body.

They walked up and down on the verandah, and Christine talked about the movements of the stars. Mark remembered a similar conversation that had taken place with Leonora a few nights previously. Then he had enjoyed it. But now the long words and learned terms seemed ill-suited to the rosy lips and languid tones of Christine. She bored him, and he was glad when they went in. Within the drawing-room unusual scenes were taking place. The cousins had asked for some music, but as Leonora turned over song after song she denied knowing any one of them.

‘I am sure I never played or sang that,’ she said, rejecting one with a rather elaborate accompaniment. And finally she chose a song of Christine’s remarkable for nothing but its feebleness. Even then she blundered over the accompaniment, and, rising from the piano, remarked, ‘I never can play anything from sight.’

‘You used to be able to play anything,’ said her cousin. ‘Try and play something by heart.’

Hitherto Leonora had excelled in that art, where the fingers seem to move without guidance, unconsciously taught by the brain. To-night all her skill failed her, not a piece could she play, all was mere bungling, and she turned from the piano in disgust.

Marshall, leaning by the empty fireplace, looked on with a sardonic smile, delighting in the success of his experiment. The smile increased as he saw Leonora throw herself upon a sofa and begin uttering silly little nothings to her cousin. And when Christine, with Mark, came into the room, he asked whether she would sing.

Unlike her sister, there seemed nothing Christine would not undertake. She unhesitatingly accepted a song of Mark’s choosing which he never noticed was inscribed with Leonora’s name, and sat down to sing it. But the hands that touched the keys played uncertainly, and the voice was but a feeble pipe that tried the elaborate cadences.

‘How silly,’ remarked one of the cousins, ‘for Christine to think she can sing like Leonora!’

‘I never imagined she could do it so well from sight,’ replied the other.

As for Leonora, she took no notice of anyone, merely lounging on the sofa, as if she was intended for an ornament, while Christine laughed and talked enough for two.

‘Leonora wants to captivate Mr. Darrel by looking and behaving just like Christine,’ the cousins said. And the words fell on Leonora’s ears, making her strangely uncomfortable.

They had bidden their guests good-night and were going upstairs. Leonora was conscious of not feeling like herself, of a nature struggling within her to which she was unaccustomed. A book lay upon a table in her room, she took it up and looked at it, but laid it down again after reading a line or two. It seemed incomprehensible. What had made her attempt anything so dry and unreadable?

She leaned from the window and looked across at the sea rolling under the starry sky. Surely, once upon a time, these things had more meaning for her than they offered this night? She could not remember. Everything seemed dim and distant as in a past existence. She thought of her cousin’s speech. The idea was consoling.

‘I must be in love,’ she said to herself.

In love with Mark Darrel. It was a restful idea, and in dwelling upon it Leonora found comfort.

Christine Rivers felt within her a power unfelt before when she awoke the next morning. She really had no idea she was so clever, and whilst dressing designed a new gown that should fill all the girls of Paignton with envy. But other things besides dresses occupied her attention. She carried two fat learned volumes away from the lending library, astonishing the librarian, and causing Leonora to exclaim:

‘How can you read those things?’

‘You used to read tough books,’ replied Christine. ‘It’s my turn now. *Voilà tout!*’

But Leonora knew nothing about the time when she read hard books. She sat on a bench looking at the sea and thinking of Mark. And the thoughts made her soul look out of her eyes, so that, for the first time, people remarked how very beautiful Miss Rivers’s eyes were.

The change in the sisters was obvious to everyone. Mark Darrel did not quite like it. He took no notice of Leonora, but he certainly did not admire the transformed Christine. The learning that sat so well on her sister seemed with her mere pedantry. And how conceited she was! Moreover, there remained all manner

of little airs and graces which ill-suited her new style of character. A learned coquette! Could anything be more appalling? Yet Mark tried to persuade himself that he loved her. He had got the woman, or rather the combination of women, that he wanted, and he had no intention of owning himself dissatisfied. Certainly not to Ernest Marshall, who a few days later rather maliciously asked how he liked the results of the experiment, as if he did not expect any expression of pleasure.

Out of pure devotion to Christine Mark plodded miles by her side in pursuit of insects, entomology being the science she was pleased to study. Christine did not walk fast and soon tired. She was not accustomed to walking. It was a true case of the spirit being willing and the flesh weak.

At last she managed to tire herself out, and Mark, arriving one day to keep an appointment, found her lounging on the sofa in one of the old luxurious attitudes, and looking lovely. Resolutely he turned his eyes from the impaled daddy-long-legs near her and tried to imagine her the Christine of his ideal—beautiful, and gifted with a brilliant genius. He shoved aside the daddy-long-legs, and sat in its place. And then he asked her to marry him.

‘Oh, Mr. Darrel, what are you saying?’ she cried. ‘I am sure I have done nothing to lead you into such a mistake. I never intend to marry. I feel a higher career before me than most women care for. I mean to devote myself to science, it is so interesting. Have you seen any crane-fly?’

Feeling rather crushed Mark restored the insect.

‘Thank you,’ said Christine. ‘Please let us imagine this conversation unspoken, Mr. Darrel.’

She was so cool, so indifferent; Mark had an uncomfortable sensation of being the most agitated of the two. He never detected a certain watchfulness in her eyes, nor did it occur to him again to press his suit. He was glad to say good-bye, glad to find himself in the garden.

Leonora was there, gathering flowers. During these few weeks of neglect Leonora had been doing something very wonderful, she had been growing beautiful. Mark could not help thinking that she was strangely improved as they clasped hands over a rose-bush and he begged for one of the buds. He did not hurry from the place as fast as he had thought to do, but lingered in the garden with her, and they talked about Christine’s turn for learning.

‘It seems so odd,’ Mark said, ignoring that he knew all about it. ‘You used to be the clever one caring for all these things.’

‘Used I?’ pensively replied Leonora. ‘They have lost all their pleasure now for me. I am restless, unhappy. I want something, but I don’t know what it is.’

‘Shall I tell you?’ half whispered Mark. ‘It is someone to love and cherish you always as I should do.’

Not half an hour had elapsed since he had proposed to Christine, yet, as he spoke to Leonora, he knew that this time he was doing right. The girl whom all along he had loved was in his arms. To him she seemed perfect as they kissed amongst the rose-bushes.

‘A nice use you have made of my kindness,’ Marshall said, when the engagement was announced. ‘I made a perfect woman for you, and you choose the one who combines her sister’s faults with her own.’

‘You may keep the perfect woman for yourself,’ Mark replied. ‘I never knew, until you meddled with Christine, how intolerable such a woman could be. Leonora quite satisfies me; I don’t want any more experiments.’

Some gossips have been unkind enough to say that the change of character in the sisters is entirely due to their desire to marry Darrel. These people declare that the labours of the younger sister in science, and her successes, are the effects of disappointment, and that Mrs. Darrel hides her learning under a bushel because her husband dislikes ‘very superior women.’

And Mark, when driven to confession, is obliged to own that he shut his eyes at the most critical point of that psychical experiment.

B. F. CRESSWELL.

# BELGRAVIA ANNUAL.

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## My Christmas Eve at Marzin.

### I.

**I**T was a strange episode, that Hungarian engagement of mine. As long as I live, though I live to be ninety, I shall never forget it.

I had finished my three happy years at Oxford just then, and, by the merest chance, while I was playing Micawber and looking about for something to turn up, I happened to see in the *Times* one day an advertisement of a vacant post in Hungary—of all places in the world—‘English Tutor required immediately for a boy of 15. University man preferred. Liberal salary. All found. Apply to His Excellency the Count of Marzin, 137 Ringstrasse, Vienna.’

‘By Jove,’ said I to myself, taking it for granted the engagement would be at the same address, ‘here’s a chance for me to see something of the world. Nothing could be jollier. I’ll write to the Count and bag the appointment. Vienna’s the very place of all Continental capitals I’d like to go to.’

And, in fact, within a week from that time, I’d secured the post, and set out in very good spirits from London. The salary was excellent: the arrangements were most princely. I was to live like a fighting-cock on the fat of the land, and to have a suite of rooms all of my own in the Count’s palace, besides a riding-horse and valet, and other advantages. ‘I’ve fallen on my feet this time,’ I thought to myself as I whirled along in the comfortable drawing-room car (passage paid) from Brussels on the Vienna express. ‘I shall live in the gayest metropolis in Europe, and enjoy myself hugely like a man of fashion, all at his Excellency the Count of Marzin’s private expense.’

When I reached Vienna, however, and drove in the handsome equipage that was waiting for me to 137 Ringstrasse, I learnt with some surprise that I was only expected to sleep in town one night, and that I was to proceed to Marzin forthwith by rail and travelling carriage, setting out on my journey the very next morning.

‘And where’s Marzin?’ I asked the Count in my best and purest German, as I did ample justice to the excellent supper spread on the table before me.

His Excellency, a tall and gloomy man, smiled a smile of surprise that any human being should be really ignorant of the whereabouts of his own hereditary dominions, and answered with some amusement, ‘In Hungary, of course; away beyond Pesth, in the Debreczin district, as you go across the plain towards Transylvania.’

I confess I was a good deal disappointed to learn it, and still more disappointed when, after three days’ hard travelling, I actually arrived at the town of Marzin itself. It was a lost feudal burgh, all one long street, in the dark heart of a lonely forest country. Pine-trees and chestnuts girded it round; a river ran brawling in a ravine at its base. The Castle, to be sure, perched high on a rock, though gloomy and forbidding, was large and handsome; the suite of rooms and the valet were all laid on strictly according to contract; and my pupil, young Count Hermann, turned out a pleasant and engaging boy with an English manliness and frankness of face I had hardly expected to find in any Hungarian. Still, it was one thing, you will allow, to accept a post in gay Vienna, and another to find oneself thus practically buried alive in a remote country town in the deepest recesses of the Magyar forests.

The Count himself had accompanied me back from Vienna to the Castle, where he meant to spend the autumn and winter; and Hermann assured me with much delight that before very long the boar-hunting season would set in, and we should then have sport, and to spare, of the most adventurous description.

Sure enough, in about six weeks from the time of my arrival, the Castle filled up rapidly with a large party of Hungarian magnates—fat and jovial gentlemen—come to enjoy the festivities of the hunting season. The blast of the horn was loud on the hills, and the baying of dogs came from the high kennels. One lovely September evening, in fact, we started the sport by setting out for a torchlight exploration of the forest to hunt up the lairs of certain wild boars observed of late in their haunts by the verderers, who had been beating the bush in search of large game with spear and rifle for several days past. The Count didn’t intend to shoot that night, to be sure; his hunting party was arranged for the next morning. The idea was merely to investigate the ground while the boars were about on their nocturnal rounds, and see in what particular glades and nooks of the forest we were most likely to fall in with good sport on the succeeding day.

It was a weird, strange sight, that torchlight party, threading its way silently through the wild woods. Never before had I felt the Middle Ages with their picturesque feudalism brought so near to us. We started from the stone steps of the great, dark Castle, where suits of armour and huge heads of stags decorated with barbaric splendour the antique hall; and, accompanied by a crowd of liveried retainers in forestine costumes, we marched forth in a body into the primæval woodland, with its moss-grown logs covering the uneven ground and its undergrowth of fern and adder's-tongue lilies carpeting the soft bed of vegetable mould that spread beneath the venerable beeches and chestnuts. I was transported at one stroke into the storied days of Robin Hood or the Forest of Arden. At our head went the verderers, clad all in green, with their curious Hungarian torches in their hands—each consisting of an iron cage, perched on the top of a long rod, and containing lighted fir-cones steeped in petroleum. The murky smoke and the red glare cast a lurid light on the gnarled trunks and branches of the oaks as we passed, and seemed somehow to heighten and exaggerate the gloom and mystery of the forest abysses that loomed darkling in front of us with their imagined terrors.

The Count, however, from the very outset, seemed particularly annoyed with the conduct of one of the verderers, a sullen-looking fellow of the name of Janos, which I take to be the Hungarian equivalent for John. The man was careless, indeed, and very clumsy: he didn't duck his torch, as he ought to have done, when he passed beneath a tree with low sweeping branches, and several times the Count called out to him angrily, 'Take care, Janos. If you don't look out, you'll set the forest on fire with your torch all round us.'

But Janos only looked sullenly back, and answered in bad German with an insolence which certainly surprised and astonished me, 'Don't trouble your head, Count; I'm all right. I've known the forest here longer than you have.'

Two or three times the same thing occurred, and each time the Count grew angrier and angrier, and Janos in turn more and more obviously insolent.

It was plain there was an old score to clear up between them.

At last the Count fairly lost his temper. 'When are your wages due?' he asked, setting his teeth firm and repressing his anger.

'On Christmas Eve,' the man answered with a defiant air. 'Do you want to get rid of me? If you do, I'm ready to chuck it all up and go to Vienna.'

The Count's face was white with anger now. 'Don't provoke

me!' he cried. 'You know the penalty. So be it, then. On Christmas Eve you have your discharge. Come for your wages; take your papers of freedom; and, after that, be no more my vassal.'

'What does he mean?' I asked of Hermann, hardly grasping at once the full sense of this hurried colloquy.

'Why, you see,' my pupil answered, in a matter-of-fact tone, 'he's a vassal of Father's, and Father's bound to find him house and home and pay him his wages as long as he remains so. But, if they mutually agree to consent to a release, Janos can throw off his homage to his master and be nobody's man—a waif and stray—provided only he quits Hungary and goes forth upon the world without a lord to take care of him. My father and he have always been at loggerheads. Some quarrel about Janos's daughter, I believe. I'm glad they've agreed at last to a release. It spoils one's sport when a vassal's insubordinate.'

Very strange it sounded in my ears to hear this frank feudalism still talked so calmly among men of our own century; but many things are strange and quaint in Hungary that no amount of surviving mediævalism in that queer country really surprises one after once one gets there.

It did surprise me, though, to hear the angry way in which Janos retorted to his powerful lord. 'You have spoken the word. So be it then, Count. On Christmas Eve, come weal, come woe, I shall ask for my wages. And accounts will then be settled between us.'

A young German doctor, with a light moustache, who had only arrived at the Castle that morning, touched my arm lightly. 'A bad evening to irritate the Count,' he whispered in a very low voice. 'I've been examining his eyes, you know, this afternoon, and I find them in a most seriously diseased condition. He's out of sorts altogether at my bad report. If Mr. Janos takes my advice, he'd do well not to provoke his master needlessly.'

I hardly understood at the moment the doctor's full meaning, for as yet I hadn't the slightest idea how thoroughly feudal and almost despotic was the Count's position.

'Who's this young fellow?' I asked Hermann once more, as the doctor moved over, with an anxious expression, to the Count's side. 'He seems to speak like one in authority.'

'Oh, *him*,' Hermann answered,—'the fellow with the moustache? Why, he's Herr Doctor von Beneke, the great eye-specialist on my father's disorder, from Berlin University.'

I nodded my head and thought no more of it. We went on a little further through the deep forest, the party now separating to right and left, and Hermann and I followed the Count, who in turn kept close to the recalcitrant Janos.

As we reached a specially dark and lonely part of the wood, overhung by yew-trees, the Count, now black-browed and moodier than ever, turned angrily to his vassal once more, and cried aloud, 'Janos, you're dropping sparks from your basket!'

'I'm not,' the man answered, and glared upon him fiercely.

The Count's face grew red as fire, though I confess I hadn't noticed the sparks myself. 'You are, I tell you,' he repeated, with profound conviction. 'Don't contradict *me*, or, by Heaven, it'll be worse for you!'

'It's a lie!' Janos shouted out, flinging down his torch, and putting it out all at once with a shower of damp leaves crunched down with his heel on the remaining fir-cones. We were left in darkness, save for the struggling light from the other distant torches.

What followed, I hardly saw or understood. I only knew that I heard through the gloom the report of the Count's gun, and a loud shriek close by from some wounded creature.

Next moment the other verderers ran up in haste with their lurid torches. We all saw distinctly what had happened then. Janos lay weltering in a pool of blood on the ground—shot through the head, and bleeding profusely—a hideous spectacle.

## II.

For three minutes or more there was an awful silence. Then the Count pointed with his forefinger to the ghastly corpse. 'Take him up,' he said in an authoritative tone: and two verderers, taking him up between them, carried him home in their arms in solemn order.

We marched back to the Castle by twos and threes, along the huntsmen's trails, with hushed feet. At the head went the torches, and the men with the corpse. Just behind, the Count himself walked alone, in a space, erect and proud. The rest of the party hung back a little, and whispered among themselves in awestruck voices.

As for me, I was horrified, thunderstruck, aghast. Such a deed of blood I had never before seen, and I trust I may never again see in a lifetime.

When we reached the Castle, however, and began to talk more freely among ourselves under the lights of the hall, I was astonished to find nobody else in the whole party regarded the matter in at all the same serious way that I did. To me, with my ingrained English ideas, it was of course murder—simple murder. I took it for granted the Count would be tried for it, found guilty, and duly sentenced. I regarded myself as the chief witness against the unhappy man. I expected to be called upon to give evidence at the trial, and to see my employer hanged or beheaded,

But the Hungarian magnates at the Castle, I soon found out, were full merely of regret and commiseration for their host and entertainer. No thought of the wretched victim in any way. Such a pity the evening's sport should have so sad an end! And Marzin, too, of all men in the world, who was always so kind and considerate to his vassals!

Of course he'd pension off the widow and children handsomely! Such a conscientious man, Marzin! and munificent too! So full of a sense of his feudal obligations!

'But the trial?' I asked, in a maze of surprise. 'He'll surely be tried for it? Murder is not allowed to go scot-free in Hungary?'

The bland-looking old gentleman in mild spectacles to whom I put this innocent enquiry gazed back at me with a curious glance of benign astonishment. 'A man of Marzin's rank!' he answered, much amused. 'Put on his trial before an open court for killing a vassal! Oh, dear me, no! You don't understand our Hungarian system. Marzin's a sovereign Count in his own dominions. He has rights of life and death over his retainers. The fellow provoked him, and was frightfully insubordinate. Marzin very generously offered him his discharge from Christmas Eve. I wouldn't have done as much: I'd have lost my temper and thrashed the fellow soundly on the spot. But Marzin's a man of admirable self-control. He restrained his passion. Only when the fool provoked him a second time after a promise of discharge did he exercise his undoubted sovereign right, and shoot him on the spot for insubordination.'

My blood boiled with indignation within me. 'In England,' I said coldly, 'we should call it murder—and, Count or no Count, we'd hang the man for it.'

The mild-mannered old gentleman shrugged his shoulders. 'But in Hungary, my friend,' he said very quietly, 'I advise you not to air such revolutionary sentiments.'

### III.

THAT evening late, as I sat in my own room, writing a fervid account of this horrible scene, which still haunted my eyes, to my friends in England, a knock at the door disturbed me suddenly.

'Come in,' I said.

It was the German doctor.

'I want to ask you a question particularly,' he whispered in a low voice, as he took the seat towards which I motioned him. 'You were with the Count when this—well, this unfortunate accident, let us say, occurred; and you know he was annoyed

because he saw sparks fall from the verderer's cage. Now, the question is, did *you* see them ?'

'No,' I answered reluctantly. 'I certainly saw nothing. . . . To tell you the truth, I was looking that moment the other way. But I think there were none. If you want to know for sure, let's ask Hermann. He's in his own quarters, just next my bedroom here.'

We went into the boy's apartments, and, rousing him as he lay, put the question to him. He was awake still, but his face reddened violently when we asked him outright.

'Well, no,' he answered at last, when Von Beneke assured him he wanted the information from the point of view of a symptom for a medical reason. 'There were *no* sparks. I was looking close—I couldn't have overlooked them. But for heaven's sake don't say so to anybody. . . . My father killed the man under a misapprehension.'

'Humph !' Von Beneke answered with a firm set of the lips. 'I thought as much myself. It's a mark of his malady. He thought he saw the sparks fall, I don't doubt. Lights dance continually before a patient's eyes in cases of this sort—sometimes they envelope the whole field of vision. . . . No doubt the Count was very much mistaken. . . . It's a pity to think, though, that that poor fellow's life was fooled away in a moment of haste, all through a nervous affection of the retina !'

'In England,' I replied with cold persistence, 'we apply a harder name to a mistake of that sort.'

#### IV.

IN spite of the incident, however, I stopped on at Marzin. My first impulse, of course, like any other Englishman's, was to throw up my tutorship and refuse to serve under a man whom I regarded simply as a murderer. But I liked Hermann and his mother the Countess ; and both were so alarmed at the Count's behaviour, and so genuinely terrified as to what might happen next, that for their sake I consented to stop on, and help them to keep a guard upon their dangerous relative. Their position was so lonely, it awakened one's sympathies. In that wild world there was no one else to look after them.

The Count, it was clear, though he held himself to have acted quite within his rights, and to have executed pure justice upon a rebellious subject, was yet by no means through all these days without his qualms of conscience. He took care to pension off the murdered verderer's wife with a good salary, and to find lucrative posts on other estates for all his children. But a moody remorse held his soul, for all that ; he hated to look towards the

scene of the murder, or to hear any mention of Christmas made before him. There were to be no Yuletide festivities that year at the Castle, no decorations in the hall, no feast in the village. Anyone could see with half a glance that the Count's heart was gnawed by a fruitless repentance. He walked apart from all, a solitary creature; his own thoughts pursued him with relentless persecution.

I knew in my heart why he dreaded Christmas. He remembered those last words Janos had spoken to him: 'On Christmas Eve, come weal, come woe, I will ask for my wages. And accounts will then be settled between us.'

Did he expect Janos to come back for them bodily from the grave? Did he expect that last account to be settled also?

Heaven only knows. All that we knew who watched him closely through those terrible weeks was that as Christmas Eve approached the Count grew ever moodier and moodier.

On the night before the arrival of that dreaded vigil, as we sat in the drawing-room of the dark old Castle, the Count rose suddenly from his chair in alarm, and approached the window that looked towards the village.

'What are all those lights?' he cried, 'those lights in the houses? Didn't I give orders, Countess, there were to be no illuminations at Marzin this year? Who has dared to put up those lamps? What do they mean by disobeying my commands? Is the world relapsing into anarchy before our very eyes?'

We rushed to the windows, Hermann and I. Darkness there, save for a few vague twinkles. Von Beneke seized the Count's arm reassuringly.

'My dear Excellency,' he said in a soothing voice, 'you need more *santonin*; this is purely nervous. Let me give you a dose. There are no lights at all except the usual village dips. Your eyes are worse. The illuminations are all in your retina.'

The Count fell back in his chair with a heavy groan.

'Perhaps so!' he muttered. 'Perhaps so! Perhaps so!'

## V.

THE next night was Christmas Eve.

We kept it at the Castle with appropriate gloom. Dinner was sepulchral in its solemnity and silence. In the evening, in the *salon*, we pretended to amuse ourselves, very sadly. The Countess played a dismal song without words, and Stéphanie, her daughter, sang a mournful ballad. But our faint pretence at merriment was duly wretched. Nobody believed the half-hearted attempt. We knew we were all becomingly unhappy,

At ten o'clock we retired, wearied out, for the night. The lamps were put out in the great hall, and I went by myself to my own suite of apartments.

For half an hour all was still in the Castle. Then a terrible shriek from the Count's dressing-room brought us all with one accord, family and servants, half-clad and trembling, into the corridor outside it.

I opened the door, and glanced into the room. The Count was standing in his dressing-gown by the closed window, and gazing with an agonised look upon his face into the thick darkness that enveloped the forest. His eyes were fixed in the direction of the spot where he had so cruelly slain the unhappy verderer.

'Father! Father!' Hermann cried, rushing over to him in horror. 'What on earth have you seen? What, what's the matter?'

The Count raised his hand, and pointed with one dark finger out of the window. 'Look, look!' he shrieked, in a wild voice of despair. 'He's coming! He's coming! It's Janos! Janos!'

'Where? where?' Hermann exclaimed, looking out into the blank.

'There! yonder!' the Count answered, still pointing wildly with that sepulchral finger towards the gloom of the forest. 'I can see him marching on, I can see his glare! He's waving his torch! Look, look at the light of it! Away over from there—from where I killed him!'

Von Beneke laid his hand upon his patient's arm soothingly once more. 'Calm yourself, Count,' he said in a quiet tone. 'There's nothing in the wood. It's only the optic nerve again. The light you see is morbid and internal!'

But the Count shook him off with a terrible groan. 'No, no,' he cried aloud. 'You can deceive me no longer. I know your tricks. I see it all now. I see it plainly. It's Janos coming to claim his wages. It's Janos coming to settle accounts between us.'

'Hold him down!' Von Beneke cried to two of the servants. And by main force they held the struggling wretch down between them.

But the Count still gazed at the window and cowered. 'He's coming nearer!' he shrieked aloud in an agony of terror. 'I can see his red wound. I can see his light growing bigger and bigger. He's coming to settle accounts at last. . . . Here, Stéphanie, Hermann, come and help me, help me! . . . After all, I was just to his wife and children. . . . I was more than just. I was generous, generous. . . . He can't call it murder! It wasn't a murder! I'm Count of Marzin—magnate of Hungary—a sovereign lord on my own estate. It was an execution—only a

righteous execution.' He buried his face in his hands with horror 'But he's coming,' he cried. 'He's coming! He's coming!'

'Hold him tight,' Von Beneke whispered low again. 'It's only a paroxysm. In twenty minutes it'll be all over.'

'All over!' the Count repeated in an awestruck tone. 'In twenty minutes it'll be all over! . . . So it will! So it will! He comes nearer and nearer! . . . Ay, look at him there on the Castle steps! See his torch! See his torch! How it flares and tosses! *Himmel!* he's going to set fire to the Castle wall! Take us out! Take us out! He'll burn us alive here!'

'Turn him round to the door—away from the window,' Von Beneke said in quiet tones to the two servants. 'Yes, that'll do—so. From there he can't see the spot any longer.'

But, even as he spoke, the Count rose wildly with a bound from the seat into which they had forced him, in spite of the four stout hands that held him, and, struggling wildly to get himself free, rushed out, still clutched hard, into the open corridor.

'See, see!' he shrieked, with a face like a maniac's. 'He's here! He's here! Within the castle! He's found me at last! He's come to murder us!'

Von Beneke caught him round the waist as he spoke, and with a violent effort attempted to hold him. But the Count, now raving, would not be held. 'Oh, the light! the light!' he cried. 'The flare! The glare of it! The Castle's all aflame with his torches now! Escape, escape, Marie—Hermann—Stéphanie! The flames are rising like tongues of fire! He's burning us down! It's Janos, Janos!'

With one wild burst he half broke from their arms. They pulled him down fiercely. There was a short, sharp struggle, and a terrible thud. The next thing I knew, the Count was lying on the floor, in his turn, in a pool of blood, and Von Beneke and the servants were kneeling close above him.

When they took him up at last, he was white in the face and stone-dead. He had broken a blood-vessel in his terror and excitement.

And when Von Beneke came to examine the retina next day at leisure he said that at the exact moment of death the whole world must have seemed one vast blur of light, one vivid blaze of fire, to the diseased vision of that self-condemned murderer.

GRANT ALLEN.

## One Christmas Eve.

‘This woman walketh in the smile of God.’

THE soft light in which the room was bathed was as tenderly green as the still water in some deep sea-cave. It flooded all around, lending a faint mystic tone to everything over which the silence of night was brooding. It softened the shadows until they lost all hardness of outline, and added a silver shine to the whiteness of the lily, that stood out, tall and distinct, against the dull crimson curtains. From the shadow of the bed dark eyes watched the fairness of the flower—watched it with eyes that now and again grew misty with tears. Almost as still and white as yonder flower was the watcher, but the flower was unconscious of the heartache of the woman.

Only that morning had rested in her arms for the first time a little baby, and now the arms were empty; small wonder that the lily wavered through a mist of tears.

‘It is well with the child,’ she murmured gently, and her eyes turned to the scarlet holly-berries wreathed about the mirror, faint reflection, in this saddened chamber, of the glad season abroad.

‘Scarlet as drops of blood’—the thought ran through her mind, their vivid colouring intensified by the lily’s fairness.

Silence, calm, unbroken, in the pale, uncertain light, until the tear-dimmed eyes, watching sadly the tall white flower, became aware that it was growing whiter, whiter; a stream of moonlight was stealing in, giving it added brilliance, added lustre; now it stirred all its white petals, as if touched by some gentle breeze, now its faint fragrance was borne across the room, and the tearful eyes noted that what had appeared to be moonlight were the white draperies of the angel form that held the flower.

‘Angela,’ he said softly.

‘Yes.’ She was not surprised or frightened, she had expected the summons.

‘It is Christmas Eve,’ he said. ‘I bear a message to every mother whose baby is laid in her arms to-day. Will you come with me?’

She rose—her weakness gone, her tears all dried—and clasped the hand he held towards her.

The night without was still, the crescent moon shone down through a frosty sky, the myriad stars twinkled brightly, and yet through all the clear atmosphere there was still a faint greenish tinge like the calm water in an ocean cave—or was it the mystic light of the moon?

But there was little time to wonder, as the strong hand, clasping hers, drew her along, till it seemed as if her weakness vanished under the influence of his strength.

The starry night was forsaken now; they were standing—the strong angel and the weak woman—by the side of a bed on which lay a mother. A young mother, with a smile glad and proud about her lips; in her arms nestled a tiny form close against her breast.

But as the white-clothed form paused by her side, and she became aware of his presence, she moved a little restlessly, and drew her baby closer.

He loosened for a moment his firm clasp on Angela's hand, and, stooping, touched the child lightly.

'Do not, do not,' cried the mother. 'I will not,' and her voice gathered strength with passion, 'I will not give him up!'

'The choice lies with you,' replied the angel, and his voice was grave and sad. 'On Christmas Eve the choice lies with the mother.'

Of a sudden, through the darkened room, there was a flash of light, and in it shone out clearly a picture. Angela, breathless, clasped the angel's hand again, whilst she strove to realise it.

A lighted room, the firelight flickering on the walls, comfort, luxury, on all the rich interior. In the doorway a tall, stern, grey-haired man; his eyes turned now on the little forlorn group of children gathered about the fire, now towards where a woman, grey-haired also, sorrowed apart.

'I renounce him,' the man said, and there was more passion and grief in his voice, unraised as it was, than if he had cried aloud. 'Disgrace—shame! He has brought down our grey hairs, his mother's and mine, with sorrow to the grave. He is my eldest son, and I can only say that I wish he had never been born.'

The children sobbed, the mother's tears fell fast; the father, in his strong frozen grief, faded from sight, and the young mother—sleeping now—still clasping her baby, alone remained.

'He would be better in my care,' the angel sighed.

'Life,' murmured the mother—she did not open her eyes—

‘life at any cost. I have no fear of any evil for my child. Care, a mother’s tender care, will be his from his cradle. What is there to fear?’

Again the hush of the quiet night, the starry skies, and then a pause by another bedside. A very different one this time. A patched quilt drawn over this mother and her tiny new-born babe, but little the baby heeded either the roughness of its surroundings or the noise outside, as it slept in its mother’s arms. The woman slept too, a woman young and pretty, and with the tender pathos of recent motherhood about her. But even in her dreams her arms tightened about the child as the white-clad figure paused beside her.

‘Not death,’ she sighed.

‘Wait, wait.’

The angel spoke, and there was a shade of pleading in his voice, and on the bare walls of the little room there appeared a sudden picture.

A dreary night, the wind blowing the snow in pitiless gusts across a long dark bridge. No stars above, no reflections of light in the gloomy water below, into which the snowflakes fell and vanished. No passengers—who would be abroad on such a night! Stay, just one. A woman too, with a thin shawl wrapped about her—little protection there from the cold whirling storm. A woman young and pretty, as the dim light from a gas lamp for a moment threw into relief a white delicate face against the cold inclement sky. One moment’s stillness, then a voice. Ah, what a cry of pain!

‘I wish that I had died when I was born, that I had never known all the sin and pain there is in this unhappy world! No mother to help or guide me. Lost, miserable, there is no place for me in all the world!’

There was a cry audible above the wind and rain, or was it the echo of that first heart-broken one? Then silence, save for the howling storm, and the dim light showed no form outlined against the blackness. The snowflakes fell faster than ever into the dark hurrying river, which was black and cold as the night beneath which it flowed.

‘What a terrible dream!’

The mother shivered a little, and drew her baby closer—closer to herself, further from the white-robed angel.

‘Love—a mother’s love,’ she sighed, ‘would guard from sin and trouble alike.’

‘Human love,’ the angel whispered, ‘can avail so little.’

But the woman replied not, and the watchers passed away into the night beyond.

And now once more they were in a room, a different one again from the last. A splendid room in a splendid house, the walls hung with pictures; the dimly burning night-light showed faintly forth the many treasures with which the place was full. Everything told of the wealth and luxury which reigned throughout a great house. In the silence of the shaded light a woman's anxious pained eyes were turned to the white-winged angel.

'You bring a message of death,' she said softly; and her eyes, so full of pain, so full of courage, did not falter. 'Take him. See, I give him to you—my little longed-for son. Crippled, unhappy baby, take him into your safe keeping.'

While his hand yet touched the child, 'Look first,' he said, and within the shadow of the great bed there appeared a picture. A room, magnificent even as this one—might it not have been the same?—and on the bed a white, dimly-outlined form, and a face, beautiful in death, with the beauty of courage and nobility. And all the room was full of figures whose cries and mourning filled the still air.

'We loved him,' they cried, 'and alas, he is dead!'

One stood by his side and watched the silent figure, and clasped her hands, and sobbed. 'He was a cripple too, but until I saw his life I never knew how suffering should be borne!'

'Motherless and alone, he went on his weary way, bearing his pain—to us all alike he has shown the way. Oh God! what loss if we had never known him, never learnt to follow his brave example! Courage, virtue, patience, tenderness, love, when has he ever failed? It is only by following in his footsteps, striving to do as he has taught, that we can show how his memory lives yet in our hearts. We could not forget, even if we would, but yet that is not all that his life requires of us. Having shown us the way, it rests with us to follow after.'

The picture slowly faded, the mother's restless eyes opened, and sought the white-winged angel.

'I renounce the eternal peace,' she sighed. 'Give him strength for his allotted task.'

In the semi-darkness of the silent room her slender fingers unclasped the strong hand that had already hushed the child to rest. 'Leave him to do his work, and earn his rest.'

Some words the angel said, perhaps of sorely-needed encouragement, but they died away in the stillness, only the last remaining audible in the silent night.

‘Behold, his reward is with Him, and his work before Him,’ and the mother’s anguished eyes grew calmer.

One swift flight now, and they paused again. A room this time which seemed dimly familiar, or was it only the soft light which brought vague dreams of ocean caves, and still waters, deep down out of human sight?

A stream of moonlight shone through a half-closed window on to a bed, whereon lay a slender dark-eyed woman.

Such a world of sorrow in the dark eyes, such tender grief when the angel paused ere speaking the familiar words, that, as his voice, with its murmured ‘Choose,’ echoed through the silent night, in swift terror Angela clasped his arm, all the past surging in upon her.

‘Oh, do not ask her!’ she cried. ‘In her ignorance she may not choose aright.’

But, before her words were spoken, this other sad-eyed mother had spoken also; not with the swift passion of the onlooker, but with soft, human heart-break.

‘I cannot choose, because I cannot see—I trust.’ And then a sigh, which seemed to frame itself into, ‘It is well with the child.’

Who spoke those words?

The room was still and dark, save for the green, shaded light—the stream of moonlight was gone. Against the dark curtains shone the fairness of the lily, its whiteness intensified by the scarlet berries of the holly, red as drops of blood.

THE AUTHOR OF ‘MISS MOLLY.’

## Too Late!

EVERYBODY said he was a queer fellow, though I never could see it; but perhaps I was hardly an impartial judge of Dick Prendergast's qualities, for he and I were cousins and bore the same name—nay, more, we were sworn friends. Certainly, he was always given to what I called romancing. He had an insatiate thirst for ancient lore. He was for ever poring over some musty old book on magic, or trying to decipher the signs and hieroglyphics on old manuscripts, picked up goodness knows where. He was learned in the astrologer's art, and in sundry bygone theories about spirits, but that he believed in this—let us call it nonsense—never entered my head. It was simply a 'fad,' indulged in because he had no profession, the result of finding himself comfortably provided for without the necessity to work. Many a night I have known him sit up to try some ridiculous experiment, which was to bring about an equally ridiculous and impossible result, and the next day he would laugh as heartily as anyone over his failure. Still his 'fad' was necessary. It was in some sense an occupation. Wherever he went he took his books and parchments and chemicals with him, and they were continually increasing, for Dick Prendergast was a terrible rover, and at each new place he went to he was sure to pick up something to add to his store.

But a time came when he forgot his mystic experiments and hieroglyphics for a while—forgot everything, in fact, except love. He was enslaved—entranced—by a beautiful Italian girl whom he had met during his wanderings.

I hadn't heard from him for nearly a year, and my surprise was great when at length I received a letter from him, describing in a sort of rhapsody the charms of Marietta, for so was his innamorata called, and concluding with the—to me—astounding intelligence that he intended to marry her at once, and come back to England to settle down. Settle down? I laughed outright at the bare idea of this rover, this dreamer, settling down like every other Englishman who marries. In less than three months, however, it was a *fait accompli*. Dick and his Italian bride were actually located in a house at Richmond. I went to see them now and again, whenever my business allowed of it; and on the whole I thought Dick's choice had been a wise one. Marietta was

charming in every sense of the word. A true Italian, with dark hair and liquid eyes, and a face that might have belonged to a beautiful young Madonna. She was bright and lively, and had a pretty coaxing manner. I felt sure she was just the companion for Dick. He had really been giving himself up too much to the impossible ideas of a somewhat vivid imagination, and there was no knowing to what length he might have been carried away; but now here was a new absorbing interest—the interest of a beautiful wife. All the energy of his deep nervous nature was turned in a new channel. His whole soul was in his love.

The following year Dick took it into his head to spend the summer months on the Cornish coast for the sake of the fishing. He took a pretty little house near the fishing village of Trefarnon, and invited me to pass my month's holiday with him. He and Marietta both gave me a hearty welcome. The latter told me prettily her husband's friends must be her friends also.

I was a little bit curious to find out what result matrimony had had on my old friend. I had learnt nothing during my flying visits to Richmond. Had his love for Marietta been lasting? Had it been deep enough to banish his old fondness for mystic lore? Alas! no. The day I arrived at Trefarnon I was satisfied of this.

'Come into my den, Robert,' he said to me after dinner. His 'den' was nothing more nor less than a laboratory. There were crucibles and strange instruments and chemicals and old books and manuscripts scattered all about. He laughed as he saw my look of surprise. 'Dear old boy, you thought I was going to give it all up? Not a bit of it. I had this room fitted up on purpose to work in. It amuses me, and, besides, I am actually going to make something of it. No, you needn't laugh at me. I am getting to the bottom of a secret that all the wise men in Europe would give their eyes to learn.' His eyes flashed and the colour rose to his somewhat pale cheeks. 'The clue came to me in a vision one night, and I am working it out. The rest is easy, and I will know it all soon. The stars will tell me when the time comes.'

For the first time I realised that he believed in his 'fad.' Visions and stars! That from a man in the nineteenth century! It was a case of the man with the seven devils. In the old days he had studied mystic lore simply because it was interesting; not so interesting, however, but that love had made him forget it for a time. Now the old influences were at work again, and in a far greater degree than before.

By-and-by I got him to talk of his wife. Yes, he loved her still, worshipped her. She was to him the one woman on earth.

Of Marietta's love for him I was not so sure. She soon gave me to understand that she hated England. 'It is so cold, so dead,' she said in her pretty broken accent. Poor child! her warm southern blood was chilled. She was pining for her sunny native land, yet she seemed happy enough. She was young—only nineteen, almost a child still, and in a childish fashion she would enjoy herself. She did not sympathise with Dick's love of study.

'He will always read,' she complained, 'read, read, while the sun shines and the waves dance. He does not love the sun and the waves, he loves only to read.'

'He loves you,' I ventured to remark.

'Ah! yes,' and she cast her eyes down, 'he loves me, he says.' But did she love him in return? Dick said she did. He was contented; was not that enough?

One day he and I went out for a day's fishing. It was late in the evening when we returned home; Marietta had gone to bed. After supper I stayed up for a smoke. Dick was tired and said good-night to me. Having finished my pipe, I was going upstairs, when suddenly he rushed out of his room, and went swiftly past me down the stairs. His face was white and his eyes were staring wildly. He took not the smallest notice of me, but vanished into his den. I stopped to think what it could mean. He had left the bedroom door open. The lamp was lighted. I could see Marietta lying there—I knew by the breathing, asleep. What had disturbed Dick? Probably some nonsense about visions. I closed the bedroom door so as not to disturb the sleeping girl, and went downstairs again.

There was a light in the laboratory, I could see, by looking under the door. I listened, but heard no sound. Then I went outside and looked through one of the windows. He had forgotten to close the shutters. I saw him sitting with his head bent on the table. The fingers of one hand were thrust through his hair. He was evidently in deep distress. Presently he rose and began to pace up and down the room. I grew tired of watching, and as I deemed it wiser to leave him undisturbed, I went in for the night, resolving to keep a look-out on the morrow.

At breakfast Marietta inquired why he had remained up all night. He made some excuse about an experiment, but for all the cool way in which he answered her, I noticed a dangerous flash in his eyes as they rested on her. It must have been something about his wife that had annoyed him, I thought.

I spent most of my time exploring the neighbourhood round about Trefarnon, so had little chance of finding out anything further which might explain Dick's conduct. Occasionally he

accompanied me on my rambles, but more often he excused himself on the plea of business. Outwardly, at least, all went smoothly between him and Marietta. He was as devoted as ever. One morning as I was climbing a somewhat steep rock I slipped and fell, spraining my ankle slightly, so that afternoon I was obliged to remain quietly indoors. I was sitting by the open window in the little sitting-room half asleep in an easy chair, when I heard a slight rustle outside. I looked up. It was Marietta hurrying along the path that led to the sea. What a pretty graceful figure she was as she tripped by in the sunlight! Once she stopped to pluck a flower and glanced back at the house. I waved my hand to her, but she did not see me, and went on her way. In a few minutes she was lost to sight round the cliffs. Then another figure appeared. This time it was Dick. He passed quite close to the window. 'Hullo!' I said, 'where are you off to?' His eyes were fixed on the ground; he was so preoccupied as not to hear me. He went in the same direction as Marietta. He was following her, was the idea that instantly struck me. In about an hour Marietta returned and came and sat with me. I asked her if she had met her husband. She said she did not even know he was out. I told her he had gone down towards the sea just after her, at which piece of information the flush on her cheek became a little deeper.

Dick did not make his appearance again that afternoon—in fact, I only discovered he was in the house when I went into his sanctum just before dinner to fetch a book I had left there in the morning. He did not hear me enter. I put my hand on his shoulder. 'You shut yourself up too much, Dick. Can't you leave your visions and spirits for a bit and enjoy the fine weather?'

I said this to see what he would say. A troubled look passed over his features, and he replied in a dazed kind of way, 'Enjoy the fine weather?' He rose and approached the window as if to satisfy himself that the weather was really fine. 'Yes,' he went on, 'we must have another good day's fishing soon.'

That night he was busy again with his experiments, as I knew by the rattle of the bottles and jars, and now and again as I passed the door I smelt sundry chemicals. Marietta and I kept each other company. She sang some pretty Italian songs for me, and seemed altogether in a lively mood. I asked her if she sometimes felt lonely when Dick left her by herself in the evenings. 'Ah! no,' she said. 'I used to sit in his room and watch.' Then she rose hastily and said she was too tired to sit up, if I would excuse her. I retired to my room early also, as my ankle was somewhat painful.

In the middle of the night I was wakened by a crash as of glass breaking. I got out of bed and slipped down the stairs to see if anything was wrong. Dick had not yet gone to bed, for I heard his voice in the laboratory. Who could be with him at that hour? I put my ear to the door. I could only distinguish one voice. He was talking to himself. The door was locked, so I called to him more than once, but receiving no answer I went back to bed.

‘Did I hear anything fall last night?’ I asked him plainly the next day.

‘Only a bottle I let fall.’

I could not help seeing the wild glitter in his eyes and the suppressed excitement in his whole demeanour. ‘You were up too late working, Dick. You will ruin——’

He raised his hand to stop me and smiled. ‘Never mind. You mean it for my good, I know, but last night— No, I cannot tell you yet; perchance I may before the day is past if—if Fate wills it so,’ he ended solemnly, and left the room.

I then appealed to Marietta to try and put an end to this, as I told her it would ruin Dick’s health, but failed to impress her in the slightest. I could not quite make out her manner. Her thoughts appeared to be far away when I spoke, and she answered incoherently. A spirit of restlessness seemed to have taken possession of her that day. She went in and out of the house and from room to room with no object. Dick watched her every movement. Once when he thought I was out of earshot I heard him mutter, ‘To-night, to-night!’ Was anything going to happen? I would be on the alert.

‘Aren’t you going to fish to-day?’ asked Marietta at luncheon. The tone of her voice suggested that she hoped we were. I looked at Dick.

‘Oh, I forgot, Robert. I have to go into the village to see about the delivery of some parcels from London. You had better take the punt and try and amuse yourself.’ There was a frown on his face as he spoke, but he did not look up.

‘Never mind me. My *anklé* is not quite well yet, so I’ll stay in the garden and smoke.’ My ankle was perfectly well, but I was determined to stay about the house on the chance of finding out if anything more than usual was going to occur.

Accordingly I located myself in a little arbour at the end of the garden, from which I could see if anyone went in or out of the house.

The first person I saw was Rose, the maid-of-all-work, coming quickly down the garden path, seemingly in the best of humours.

‘Well, Rose,’ I called out to her, ‘going to meet your sweetheart?’

She grew red all over, and replied, in a broad Cornish accent, the peculiarities of which I do not know sufficiently to write down, ‘No, sir; I’m going home. The master has allowed me a holiday.’

‘Where is your mistress?’

‘She has a headache, and is lying down, the master says.’

Two unusual events to begin with, I thought. A holiday granted to Rose, and Marietta lying down.

A few minutes later Dick emerged from the front door, and went quickly down the path that led to the sea. He was gone on his business to the village, though he had certainly taken the most roundabout way of reaching it; but no doubt he liked the walk.

Marietta’s headache puzzled me somewhat. Scarce an hour before I had seen her and she had never mentioned it; on the contrary, she announced her intention of going out to sketch. Clearly the headache was an excuse. I sauntered round to the front of the house. She was not to be seen anywhere. The laboratory was locked and the shutters closed; that struck me as being odd. The blinds in Marietta’s room were also drawn down, so I came to the conclusion that she really had a headache, and I was imagining things for no reason at all. Well, I must stay near the house, as it would hardly be right to leave her alone in it. I took a novel and sat down on a garden-chair just outside the porch. The air was particularly sultry that day; not a breath stirred the trees or raised a ripple on the sea. Birds and bees seemed to have vanished; there was not a sound anywhere to break the silence. It was the dead calm that precedes a storm in summer. About four o’clock I was startled by some big rain-drops that fell on the page of my book. The air became suddenly thick and dark. I rose and turned indoors; just as I got into the hall I heard in the distance the report of a gun. It frightened me—I don’t know why. I went half out of the door again and listened. The ominous roll of the first far-off peal of thunder was all I heard now. The storm had begun, and ere long was raging furiously; the lightning flashed, and the rain poured down in torrents from the great heavy, driving clouds. The air was black with it. Every now and then the thunder shook the house to its very foundations, and caused the furniture to rattle. Suddenly I remembered poor Marietta; perhaps she was frightened, lying all alone. I went to her door and knocked gently; there was no answer. I called; again no answer. Had anything happened to

her? Timidly I ventured to turn the handle of the door; it was locked. I repeated my call, but it was useless. Concluding that she must have fallen asleep, I returned to the sitting-room. Hurrying towards the house I espied Dick. As he drew nearer I saw that something was amiss. I went to the door to meet him.

‘Afraid of the storm, old boy?’

His face was blanched, and his eyes were starting out of their sockets. He went straight past me into the sitting-room, and sank into the nearest chair.

‘I have done it,’ he whispered hoarsely, and at the same time took something out of his pocket and laid it on the table. It was a revolver. I felt a shudder pass through me. Instantly I thought of Marietta.

‘Done what?’

‘Killed *him*—her lover,’ he hissed.

Had he taken leave of his senses? I stared at him, now thoroughly alarmed; I felt as though I could not speak. He looked up at me quietly.

‘Sit down, Robert; I will tell you all,’ said he softly. ‘You remember that day we went fishing, about a week ago—the day we were out so late?’

I nodded.

‘Well, that night I first found it out. When I went to her room she was asleep. She looked so beautiful as she lay there, her dark hair streaming over the pillow, her dark lashes lying like a fringe on her cheek. Her hand was clasping a little cross I had given her; it was my first gift, and she always wore it round her neck. I stood watching her for a while; then, as I bent down to kiss her, she moved her hand away. I caught sight of a gleaming thing—not my cross, but a heart set with diamonds! Where had she got it? It was valuable, I saw at a glance. All at once it came upon me that it must be another’s gift. I rushed out of the room to get away from the sight of her whom I loved more than life. I passed you as I came down the stairs——’

‘I remember,’ I interrupted.

He sighed heavily. ‘God help me! I blamed you, but only for a short while, for next day I watched her and learnt the truth. I followed her. She met him there among the rocks about half a mile off; I saw her yield to his embrace—my wife, whom I deemed all mine. Oh, it was hard to keep from killing him on the spot; but *she* was there, and I must spare her, so I resolved to wait.’

‘Who was he?’ I asked.

‘A countryman of hers; some old love, I daresay. He passed as an artist in the village. An artist? a devil!’ He laughed a

low, bitter laugh. 'Day after day have I watched them meet. I found a hiding-place where I could hear the words they spoke and remain myself unseen. Yesterday—what an age it seems since then!—I heard them settle it. They were to meet to-day for the last time. To-night she was to have lain in his arms. Poor child! She had listened to his honeyed words, and she saw no sin; but I have saved her. I have killed him.'

'How?'

'Fairly—as a gentleman. I gave him the choice of pistols.'

'And she?' I hurriedly asked.

A strange expression came over his face: he smiled at me. 'She is safe in her own room. I love her yet, Robert, and I have saved her. I told you if Fate willed it you should hear what happened last night; I am spared to tell it, and you are my only friend. At dead of night I thought to learn from the stars what would be the issue of this matter; but I was destined to learn something else. All at once the room became filled with a dense blue vapour, so dense that I could not see my hand when I held it before me. I heard a sound as of a distant rushing which came nearer and nearer till it was beside me; then something was dropped on the table; the mist began to clear away and the sound ceased. I saw it there before me—a little parchment roll covered with signs, a message from the spirits of my life. Eagerly I snatched it up and deciphered the signs. It told of a spell to entrance a mortal for twelve hours, at the end of which time death would ensue unless a second spell were worked. The directions for the second spell were there also; both were easy to work. I was to use the first to entrance her, my love, to save her from sin and destruction. If I survived the duel, then with the second I was to restore her to life; but if I were slain, then never would that man have power over her more, for death would unite her to me. Now she is mine, she shall live.'

For the first time it dawned on me that poor Dick was insane. He actually believed in supernatural power; he had become a slave to his own fancies.

The story he told me was too wild to be probable; yet it was not without a feeling of dread lest there should lurk truth in it that I asked him where Marietta was.

He rose and beckoned to me. 'Come; the spirits must be obeyed.' I followed in silence up the stairs.

When we reached the bedroom door he took the key out of his pocket and opened it with trembling hands. I stood rooted to the threshold. On the bed lay Marietta, with closed eyes and colourless cheeks, perfectly motionless. That much of his story

was true. Yet I doubted if it was indeed only a trance. He kissed her pale lips again and again.

‘Saved!’ he whispered. ‘Saved, my own!’

‘For God’s sake,’ I cried at last, ‘put an end to this. Restore her to life if you can. How do you know she is not dead?’

‘Dead? No. I have it downstairs in a drawer—the spirit’s writing. I will go for it now.’

He left the room. I followed him to the laboratory. He went to a drawer and opened it.

‘Gone!’

He turned on me a countenance on which was depicted an awful fear. Gone! In that one word I heard the most agonised human cry it had ever been my lot to hear. He sank on his knees, trembling from head to foot.

‘It was there when I went out. Stay. Was anyone in this room during my absence?’ He looked at me with a kind of hope.

‘No one. The door was locked.’

The gleam of hope faded; he wrung his hands and groaned. ‘They have taken it to punish me for shedding blood; and now she must die too—my love, my life!’

‘It may be elsewhere in the room,’ I suggested.

‘No. It is not on the face of the earth, and death is inevitable.’

‘Something else might restore her.’

‘Nothing else. It is the working of the fiends, and against it human skill is of no avail. At daybreak to-morrow she will die.’

We went back sorrowfully to her chamber. He sat down and bent his head on his hands. I tried every means in my power to restore consciousness to Marietta, but all my efforts were unavailing. I almost doubted if she lived, so stiff, so cold, she lay. It was night ere I, too, sat down to watch by the bedside. There was one hope. The trance was only to last twelve hours; perhaps then she would waken to life after all. Hour after hour we waited as the night wore slowly on. Dick remained perfectly still and silent, his head bent down.

A soft wind rustling in the trees warned us of the approach of dawn. The time was drawing nigh. As the first faint pink streak appeared on the distant horizon Dick rose and bent anxiously over the corpse-like form.

‘Look,’ he said, and his voice had a hollow, far-off sound. All at once the closed eyelids twitched and the little cold hands moved; the lips parted for a moment and a soft sigh came fluttering from between them. Then a change, indescribable, impalpable, passed over the features, and all was over. The figure lay

still once more, but it was not the same stillness as before; now it was the stillness of death.

When I had recovered myself sufficiently to look at Dick I saw that he had given way under the terrible strain, and was in a swoon. I raised him gently. As I did so I perceived streaks of grey in his hair. I realised then how intense must have been his agony during those few hours of watching.

Ere night fell again he was raving in a state of high fever. I summoned nurses and doctors from London, but in a few days we knew that the end was near.

One evening I sat by the window in his room. All day long he had lain in a kind of stupor. He was too weak to rave now. The time for that had passed. The twilight shadows were beginning to fall. I watched the varying tints of the sea as the rosy sunset light melted gradually away.

‘There it is!’ I started and turned round. He was sitting bolt upright in the bed, looking eagerly before him.

‘What is it, Dick?’

‘The spirit’s writing that I lost. There it is, coming towards me!’

I followed the direction of his eyes, but perceived nothing.

‘Yes, I can read the signs. That alone would have saved her.’ Here he stretched out his hands as if to receive something. His voice grew faint and choked. ‘It is—in my grasp now—but—too late!’ He fell back with a long sigh. He was dead.

I do not attempt to give any explanation of the above strange occurrences. Whether they were due to supernatural effects or not is a question which I will not venture to answer. I have my own theories about the matter, but prefer that they shall remain my own. Dick’s story of the spirit’s message appears wholly absurd to a well-balanced mind, yet it is an indisputable fact that I saw Marietta in the trance.

EVA M. HENRY.

## On Information Received.

BY EDITH STEWART DREWRY.

Author of "On Dangerous Ground," "Only an Actress," &c.

### CHAPTER I.

#### 3 A.M. IN MAYNARD STREET POLICE STATION.

It was one bitter December night that for some few hours I did duty for the night-inspector at the Maynard Street Police Station, under exceptional circumstances which, even had the temporary substitution of officers come to the ears of the chiefs would have condoned the irregularity—for I was not attached to this station at all, nor was I even a uniform officer. I was a detective inspector attached to Scotland Yard, and it was a kind of chance as one calls it, that brought me that particular night about twelve to Maynard Street Station.

Six months before a very daring and clever bill forgery had been committed by a man whom I happened to know by sight and I was set the job of finding him, and a job it proved, and no mistake, for the man had got a clear month's start with the money; the forged bills were at three months, but by a mere accident the counterfeit was discovered at a month, just thirty days after he had quietly walked off. However, at last I traced him to America, then to Brazil, from there to France, and lastly—the fool was too secure—back to London. I had reason to believe that to-night or next he would be at a certain not very reputable house, which I watched myself from half-past ten, relieving my man. Cold work too, that hour's watch, but my six months' patience was rewarded, for presently out came my chase, admirably disguised as an old man. As he walked off towards where Maynard Street turned off, I quietly followed him, and not a stone's throw from the station arrested him.

"I want you, please, Mr. Nettleship," I said.

He was taken as flat aback as ever a vessel in a white squall could be. I hadn't a bit of trouble then to get him to the station

hard by and safe locked up, against being charged in the morning at Bow Street.

So you see that is how I came to be in there.

"Going home now, I suppose, Overbury," said the inspector as we stood by the fire in the charge-room. "Wish I was instead of four hours more on duty."

Something in his manner made me ask quickly :

"Nothing wrong at home I hope, Carey—no one ill?"

"Yes," he said, huskily; "my little Nell is down with croup, doctor said this evening he'd stop; it's touch-and-go, but if ——"

We both swung round as the door flew back, and his lad Tom rushed in, crying bitterly, his clothes whitened with snow.

"Father, father, come quick! Mother sent me! Nell—doctor say she's worse ——"

"Lord help me! I can't stop here and my child dying, if I'm sacked for it!" poor Carey said desperately.

"Go on, old fellow," I said, gripping his hand for a moment "I'll take your place—it's all right! Get home, and don't come back till ——"

I turned away, but I heard a hoarse "God bless you!" and the door shut behind the two—man and boy.

A minute after I just stepped to the large room opposite, and said a few words of explanation to the men there—not many—on night station duty. They said "Very well, sir," and "They were so sorry," which I believed fully, for Carey was a right good fellow.

This police station is built in an old stable yard, the rooms or offices I have mentioned opening from the wide arched passage way that led from Maynard Street into the yard itself; the Inspector's office was the first door on the left as you turned under the archway, the other door was on the right a few feet further down. An inner door of the first office led to the entrance passage and other rooms of the building.

I went to the arch for a minute and looked up and down Maynard Street, just, I believe, from that kind of restlessness which so often follows the relaxation of long mental strain.

What a bitter night it was, pitilessly dreary and dark; the ghost-like snowflakes falling fast and silent, whitening housetops and window ledges and roofs alike, and glistening into dazzling whiteness where the gaslight shone upon it. Sounds were muffled as

only snow can muffle, and there was not a soul in sight. Who would be out such a night and at nearly one o'clock unless compelled?—yet the next moment some one did come along, plodding his way, a gentleman in a furred ulster, a rather handsome but forbidding looking man, I thought. He said as he passed, “Detestable night, isn’t it?—no cabs for love or money. Good-night.”

“Good night, sir,” I answered, and watched the retreating form, wondering vaguely who he was, whence he came, and if he were homeward bound. I noticed that as he walked each footstep was instantly obliterated by the falling snow.

I went back to the charge-room and the fire, and as I was totally unprovided for my volunteer duty, I helped myself to some of the food which Carey had brought. About half-past one two of the usual kind of night charges were brought in—a bedizened woman as drunk as could be and a ruffian caught with burgling tools on him, hiding by a jeweller’s shop; both were locked up. After that all was quiet again, even, towards three o’clock, I may say, terribly still, and O how bitterly cold. So deadly still as to be awesome in the sense of that silent white world outside—so intensely, strangely cold, that even as I sat reading by the fire I felt as if an icy chill were striking into my very flesh and blood—and then that curious, indescribable sensation crept slowly over me which some of us have felt, of not being alone, of being watched by eyes that followed every movement, every breath drawn. With a shiver, I rose up and forced myself to turn towards the door, and look over the high railed desk table which rose like a counter half-way between fireplace and entrance. I turned, then, and was so startled that for a moment I stood absolutely still as if frozen.

I was *not* alone. I had heard neither opening nor closing of that door, but I was not alone and—the door was still shut. On the other side of the official desk stood a young and handsome woman, wrapped in a costly fur cloak, with the hood partially drawn over her head; she stood motionless, her white hands clenched on her breast, looking at me—through me—I felt as if piercing to my inmost soul, with such unutterable horror in her burning eyes and ghastly face as God send I may never see again. Who was she? What was she? There was a wedding-ring on her finger, but that was nothing; there was not a flake of white

on her sables either. Had it ceased snowing, then, or had she come in a carriage or cab? She must, such a night. She did not look insane either. And how had she entered so silently? All this flashed through my mind in a second, and then I said kindly, for I pitied her :

“Will you take that seat, madam, and tell me what you want I am the Inspector in charge.”

It seemed as if my speaking broke some spell ; perhaps it gave her courage. She moved a step forward but neither sat down nor for one second dropped that weirdly horror-struck gaze ; whether I lowered mine or looked at her I felt her gaze all the same watching me—as mad people do sometimes.

“I want,” she said, “to make a confession of blackest guilt and give myself up to justice.”

It was not the mere statement or words that went through me with an absolute shock—we often hear such “statements,” especially after any great crime—it was the manner and voice. I saw the bloodless lips moving and every line on the quiver, yet the voice sounded as if it came from a distance, strangely muffled and afar off—low, deliberate, painfully level in intonation, as if under intense suppression, and for all its level tone, instinct with a passion and terror that vibrated in each word. Outwardly I did not start or move a muscle, but internally I felt a slow horror creeping over my whole being ; there was something inexpressibly awful about this woman and her grim errand, here in such an hour and night.

Instead of opening the proper book I took a large sheet of paper upon which to take down her statement—why I never could quite have told.

“Yes,” I said quietly, in a matter-of-course, official manner, as if nothing in the world could startle the coolness of an experienced police officer—I am sure nothing ought, all things considered, if any experience can quite make a stock out of a man. “I am all attention, Madam. What is your crime?”

She answered in exactly the same strange voice and way :

“Murder. I killed him six hours ago and then went back home before I was missed by the servants, and my husband was out at his club I knew.” She paused as if waiting to be questioned, or too torn with horror and remorse to go on without some aid.

“Who is it you have murdered, then?” I asked, fully expecting the reply I got.

“My lover. He grew tired of a secret intrigue, madly jealous of my husband, and swore at last that unless I fled with him he would betray my guilt. I knew he would do it, too, and as I loved the wealth and worldly position for which I had married a thousandfold more than any human being, it was only a question of which of us should fall—which strike the blow. I would not perish, so he must. And he has,” she said, her hands clutching at the fur. But my pity was gone; the woman was a heartless devil. There was little of shame or remorse in this coming to give herself up—she was acting under the frightful, half-mad excitement of horror following the deed. She went on herself:

“I bought a long knife—pistols make a noise. Then I planned to lure him. I wrote to him. I feigned to yield, and bade him meet me one evening at nine in the old place of *rendezvous*.”

“Where was that?” I said as she paused again.

“Where we lived. We shut up the house in the winter and the gardens are let to run wild. I knew about the old unused ice-house hidden by evergreens; it is deep in the side of a dell. I found it out, but no one else knows of it—no one; so the body will never be found. I took care of that.”

“And you made your lover meet you near this place, then?” I said, looking steadily at her, and she shuddered.

“Yes,” came those far-off repressed tones that were getting almost unbearably terrible to hear. “I made him kneel as in jest to kiss my left hand, and then, as he bent his head, I stabbed him downwards—downwards, to the heart. I dragged the body into the ice-house when I had made sure he was quite dead, and threw in the knife, shut the door, re-arranged the bushes, and went back home, getting in with my secret latch-key. I felt only the relief from danger at first, but when it grew later—later—and I was alone in my room, it came upon me—seized me in its throes—the horror of the bloody deed I had done. My God! The hideous guilt and terror,” she said, wringing her hands. “But he forced me to do it! He drove me to it! The fool, to think I cared for him more than gold, and position, and the world’s praises.”

“Complete your statement, madam,” I said abruptly. “Who was the murdered man?”

The woman answered in the oddest way, as if suddenly oblivious of her own horrible confession, and the fact that I should of course on that detain her for enquiries.

“Only an obscure gentleman, with no friends, who even knew where he was ; he will never be missed or asked after and never be found. I am safe from even suspicion.”

Was she, after all, some half-mad creature under a fearful hallucination ? Somehow that idea would not hold me—the grim reality of her confession did—despite the strange, even weird, unreality about her appearance here and characteristics. I said, quietly, keeping a suspicious eye to her movements, though escape from pursuit was impossible :

“Answer me three questions, please madam. Where is the scene of the murder ? what was the victim’s name ? and what is your name and address ?”

She gave such a violent start that she quite staggered back a step, and flung out her hands.

“My God !” she said in a hoarse whisper, “what an awful dream !”

With that last word I strode round the desk to prevent her leaving, and in that second, reeled back against the wall with a smothered cry—*there was nothing there !* The woman, the form, was gone as suddenly, as mysteriously as it had come. I wrenched open the door and sprang to the arch giving on the street so swiftly that nothing of flesh and blood could possibly have been many paces in either direction, but nothing was in sight ; it had left off snowing, but there was not a footprint anywhere in the snow, nor track of a wheel in the roadway.

I turned back to the room, and sat down. I was staggered and thoroughly shaken, I confess, and it was some minutes before I could pull myself together. Then I read again the confession I had taken down, word for word, and folded it carefully away in my pocket-book, thankful I had not written it in the usual book. For I resolved at once to fathom the mystery, if possible, and unearth the crime so strangely revealed to me, by, I had not the least doubt, the murderess herself, *not* in the body, but whether spirit from beyond the grave, or “similitude” I cared little just now to think, though I had read much and with deep interest about these subjects, and many others too, I may say, for my father had been well-to-do in my youth and had given me a

superior education. That a frightful murder had been this night committed by the real self of the un-real visitant I had spoken with, I felt as certain as of my own existence, but how to find that actual personality, that handsome woman who, false to her husband, assassin of her paramour, lived in the world yet, and passed, doubtless, as one honoured, admired, praised of men. I felt I must discover and unmask her, but where was the clue to find her? Nothing was possible save the hope of seeing her somewhere. I would haunt all thoroughfares and public resorts, when off duty, I thought at length.

Carey came back near four; the little lassie was better, he said, the doctor thought she would pull through.

And she did too, I heard next day when I called to enquire.

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## CHAPTER II.

### "ON THE TRAIL."

WE "tecs," like other folks in their lines, often get our blood up over a difficult piece of work that puts a fellow on his mettle, and I did in my, at present, self-imposed task. My only confidante was my wife, for Rose could keep her pretty mouth as close as the grave, and besides I wouldn't for the world have had her feel neglected by my constant absence off duty, after six months' absence too. So I told her all.

A week passed without any result from my peregrinations after the unknown murderess, but then she might not even live in London. I wondered if we ever met—both in bodily form, whether her spirit that had seen me would recall my face, whether she would then fear that her "awful dream"—if sleeping her real self had been—was more than a dream, and that she had in the perturbed spirit actually betrayed the hideous secret of her double guilt to, of all people, a detective. I thought she would, if occult students were right.

One evening I was passing along Portman Square when ahead of me a carriage and pair pulled up, perhaps to take its owners to a dinner party or theatre. It was still a bitter frost, but, rather curious to see who came out, I paused. In a few moments the hall door opened emitting a flood of gaslight across the dry white pavement, and a gentleman and lady came out and crossed to the

carriage. I saw both plainly and caught my breath. The man was the very gentleman who had passed by at the Police Station a week ago and exchanged a word. I knew him at once, and the lady too, even to the rich sables she wore—my strange visitant, but her real self—here in all the glow of life and beauty. I saw her face plainly under the garish light, no horror in it now, no passion of terror about its lines, or smiling lips, and yet—great Heavens! how false they were! how blood-red the hand that clasped the arm of the husband she had so basely, callously betrayed with scarcely it seemed even the excuse of passion, for in the dark story told me the most painful element perhaps had been the absence of all heart as motive power and the presence only in it all of cold-blooded calculation and mere vitiated pleasure in an intrigue. I felt a positive thrill of almost triumphant gladness that I had found her, and with her the clue to bring her to justice. I could have pitied her, wished to spare her if she had sinned from the oft-told less heinous motive—but this!—it was devilish, and I was merciless. I had not even the most passing temptation to swerve from my plain path of duty, and spare her. Why her husband might be her next victim if he should chance to thwart her.

I carelessly asked a postman who came by as the carriage swept off, “who that handsome couple from 99 were?”

“Oh, that’s Gascoignes,” he said, “he’s a banker I b’lieve; and aint the missus just good, always gives us a sov. for Christmas box. I’ve heerd she’s wonderful charitable.”

He hurried on, and I went my way. So that was her game, was it, one of her vanities; the world’s praises she had meant to keep with her gold, or as a better mask to the vice of her real self. She posed as a *dame charitable* then, as well as woman of social status, fond help-meet, friend to the friendless!—this heartlessly guilty wife, this cold-blooded murderess!

Now indeed, I set myself quietly to work to find out all about the Gascoignes—Mrs. Gascoigne primarily, the husband incidentally. With well off, prominent people half the difficulties of my starting work were obviated, and the banker at least had nothing to conceal from the world of all such things as are generally known about honest folks. I need not weary with details of my cautious enquiries and movements; the result of information obtained stood in a few days thus:

Mr. Claude Gascoigne, sleeping partner in certain large banking house, had been married five years. His wife's maiden name was Ward—Olivia Ward—a beauty, but poor; and he had met her at Scarborough. He was much attached to her, and indulged her every wish that gold could gratify. She was fond of him (I knew better than that!) and bore exactly the repute the postman had said. She was held in highest esteem and liking by everyone, rich and poor,—always attended her parish church regularly, and so on. She forgot no part of the mask, clearly—this hideous hypocrite, whose moral deformity was so repulsive, whose outward self was so beautiful and innocent looking. Nature has sometimes lent herself like this to some of the greatest criminals on our rolls.

They had a cottage *ornée* at Highgate, in a lovely hilly spot somewhat apart, the garden large and—to please madame—left rather wild and rural. In the summer they often went there (ha, how many the stolen meetings in those gardens, I thought!) but in the winter it was shut up with only an old care-taker. You may imagine my next steps. I visited the place one day, outside, took the bearings and part of the paling where I could best effect entrance to the deserted grounds before dawn, lie *perdu* till daylight enough to see, and then search for the ice-house—the tomb of the murdered man.

A grim enough search it was too, I tell you, in the cold grey of the first streaks of the winter dawn, but I found the “dell”—you see I had the clue—for there were not two “dells” where any such place could be—and after careful search I found the right bushes amongst the many that grew, found the hidden door which was bolted as the murderess had left it, and I feared might make a noise—being rusted in by the ten days' damp—so I did not attempt to open it. Indeed, from this point both duty and caution required a responsible witness. Besides, in truth I was trespassing; we should strictly speaking require a warrant to search the premises. I returned therefore to Scotland Yard, went to my superintendent as soon as I could and told him the whole extraordinary story.

As I had expected he absolutely stared and demanded—“Were you dreaming, Overbury?—ghosts—similitude—what bosh! it's absurd. And Mrs. Gascoigne too!”

But I stood unmoved—steadily persistent in my story and facts

which were posing. I had never I said known the lady's existence before, or of such a place as Laurel Cottage, Highgate. He was staggered, I stood so high as a man of probity, capability and superior education. I clinched his wavering by my common sense—"Let us quietly get the warrant, sir, take the surgeon, and go to-night to search that ice-house. If a murdered corpse is *not* there I'll admit that Charles Overbury is a dreaming fool—and leave the force. If it *is* there—well we get a warrant to arrest the woman on suspicion. You can hold me to my words, sir."

"By Jove, you've beaten me Overbury!" he exclaimed changing countenance, "your earnestness forces itself on me, strange though your belief seems, you shall do as you wish—we'll go, but I don't know how such a queer story will sound in a matter-of-fact law court."

"I think it need not come out sir," said I, smiling at the idea presented, "from information received, will cover all won't it?"

"Yes. It must. Well you have taken my breath away man."

"It will take hers away, I fancy, sir, when I arrest her," I answered grimly.

\* \* \* \* \*

Well, that night we three went, the superintendent, the surgeon, and myself, absolute secrecy being necessary at present lest the least whisper should reach Mrs. Gascoigne. She was I thought the very woman to take poison if she could not escape.

I got that door of the old ice-house open and stepped in first, holding high the lantern.

There it lay at our feet—with the loathsome creeping things of the horrible vault above, below, on the walls—the rigid half-frozen body of a murdered man!

"God help us! you were right!" said the superintendent in an awed manner.

\* \* \* \* \*

"Is Mrs. Gascoigne at home?"

At three o'clock the next day I asked that question of the footman who answered my ring at 99 Portman Square.

He looked curiously at me and my companion—then across to my cab. I was well dressed, like any ordinary gentleman, a character I could well assume; my subordinate wore a rougher cloth and had no pretence to pass for gentility.

"Y-es sir, she is at home, but she and Mr. Gascoigne are still at the luncheon table."

I stepped into the hall, however, my man following at once.

"Give your mistress this card," I said quietly, "and say I wish to see her on business."

The servant took it with a dubious look and went into the dining room, a door on the left. My constable sat down on the hall chair with a nod.

I heard her voice—could I ever forget it? though now it sounded natural, near, not level or full of repressed horror—only in easy surprise, so secure was the woman of her safety.

"Mr. Charles Overbury" the silvery voice repeated from the card. "I don't know such a name; what is he like Josephs?"

"Very gentlemanlike ma'am, tall, fine looking, I should say ma'am, and may be about forty."

"Does he look like an impostor" said the master's voice—I knew that again of course—with an amused tone, "my dear Olivia, your charities draw such folk."

"No sir, he is nothing of that sort I'm sure," returned Josephs respectfully.

"Well, show him in here. Come to the fireside, Olivia."

I was shown into a handsome dining room, but as I entered I saw Mrs. Gascoigne, who was seated by the hearth, change colour—and, I am certain she held her breath; but in the look she gave me there was puzzlement, as well as a flash of apprehension—or fear.

I merely bowed, and then turned to Mr. Gascoigne, who looked hard at me, evidently not quite sure of recognition, as I said:

"May I ask sir to speak to Mrs. Gascoigne a few words alone—first."

Poor man! if he had only been out, to be spared the shock so suddenly.

"Pardon me Mr. Overbury," he answered me stiffly, "my wife has no business she minds my hearing. By the bye, I think, yes, I am sure now that I have seen you before—the night of the snow-storm, ten or twelve days ago! you were standing outside the Maynard Street Police Station.

I saw his wife start slightly, but I replied deliberately to him.

"Yes, sir. I remember your passing, I was in charge there in those four first morning hours of the 5th. I am a detective inspector"—I paused; a very painful duty was made doubly hard

by his presence. Why would he not be spared the revelation of her double guilt and his dishonour before the face of a stranger.

"Well," he said impatiently, "and what is *your* business here then with my wife?"

There was no help for it.

"This sir," I said—and walking straight to his wife, lightly touched her shoulder. "You are my prisoner Mrs. Gascoigne, charged with the murder of Ambrose Hartland."

With such a cry as might break from a stricken wild animal more than human lips, she fell back in the chair, and her husband gripped my left arm.

"What the devil do you mean?" he said fiercely; "what monstrous mistake are you under in identity, man!"

"For your sake, sir, I wish to Heaven I had made a mistake," I said, gently releasing my arm, and he fell back a step, gazing, poor fellow, almost wildly from me to his wife's deathly face as she now slowly lifted herself, recovering herself somewhat in very desperation perhaps—audacious after that first shock."

"It is some absurd mistake, of course," she said, moistening her dry livid lips. "Show your warrant please?"

I produced it, read it, and warned her to take care of what she said.

"I have nothing to fear or say except that I know nothing."

"I must know more of this though before my wife is touched," interposed Mr. Gascoigne sternly. "Who was this Hartland said to be murdered on the 5th of this month? my wife knows no such person, and if he she had why should she murd——" he stopped.

"Because, unhappily, sir, on your wife's own confession to me made about three in the morning of the sixth, at Maynard Street Station, that man was her lover and threatened to tell you unless——"

"By Heaven! you *dare* to face me with such a black lie as that!" he cried, lifting his clenched hand, but I caught it. I was a powerful man and held him easily.

"Gently, sir, and read this. I don't want to call my man in."

His hand dropped—he was ashen pale, but he never moved as he took the fatal confession, herself in the spirit surely had made. As he read, I coolly took the knives off the table and put them quite away from her reach. I had seen her look and read it.

Then I came near her again.

When Mr. Gascoigne gave me back the paper and turned to his wife, I think I never saw so terrible a change in any man, he might have grown years older in those minutes.

"That was the very hour," he said slowly, "that you woke up with a start that aroused me too, and cried out those very words, 'My God! what an awful dream,' but would not tell me what you dreamed. Was it this, Olivia! speak in Heaven's name—I will know the truth, for your silence is terrible. Have you been faithless or true to me? Answer."

She sprang to her feet like a tiger at bay.

"It is all false!" she cried fiercely, "that paper is a forgery. I was sleeping at your side! How could I be at that man's police station? I was at home all that evening. I never knew any Ambrose Hartland——"

"Stay, madam," I interposed. "The body was found in the ice-house last night, the knife by it. On the body, identified to-day by his late landlady, we found papers and letters of yours, and the last, arranging that fatal meeting——"

She suddenly sprang at me and tried to grip my throat—maddened I verily believe, but I caught her hands and bore her back to the chair in almost convulsions.

\* \* \* \* \*

I scarcely remember a greater sensation than that trial of Olivia Gascoigne made in the world, the more that somehow a few whispers got about of something uncanny at the bottom of its discovery. Link by link the evidence was put together and she was condemned. That night she died. She had managed to choke the windpipe with her own fingers. Mr. Gascoigne went abroad.

I have that paper still in my desk. I hope I may never have such another terrible confession, or such watch as that which I kept at the Maynard Street Police Station.

## My Princess Naomi.

BY MRS. ROBERT JOCELYN.

Author of "The M.F.H.'S. Daughter," "£100,000 *versus* Ghosts," &c.

### CHAPTER I.

"BUT I do not believe in the thing!" I expostulated egotistically. "I simply cannot believe in it; and there is an end of the matter!"

"I wish to goodness the matter *did* end there!" replied George Sortville quietly. "Unfortunately for me though it does not."

"You really believe in it?" I enquired.

"I do," he replied gravely. "Worse luck!"

"Well, it is a bore for you certainly," I acknowledged in a more sympathetic tone of voice.

"It is more than a bore, Jack. It is three hundred a year out of my pocket," was the doleful reply.

Now in spite of my disbelief I knew that this was a fact; and I also knew that the loss of £300 a year was without doubt rather a serious consideration for old George, and as I honestly liked him better than any other fellow I knew, I began to think the situation seriously over.

In as few words as possible this was how the matter stood:—his income depended solely upon the rent of three houses in M—Square, South Kensington, and one of those three houses was said to be so badly haunted that no living being could be found to dream of taking it.

"It is a pity you do not live in the house yourself, George," I remarked thoughtfully, at last.

"It is!" he agreed solemnly, "but I cannot do it, Jack, and that's the truth!"

"You mean to say you have tried the experiment?" I exclaimed, much surprised.

"Twice," was the grave reply, "and I would not try it a third time for three times £300 a year."

"Tell me what you heard or saw?" I urged, growing interested in spite of myself.

"No, Jack. Do not ask me to do so, I cannot," he replied quietly, but in a tone so solemn that I forebore to ask any further questions.

A few minutes' silence followed, and then a bright idea entered my head—or at any rate an idea which I thought a bright one.

"I say, George!" I exclaimed, "will you let me investigate the matter for you?"

"You!" he exclaimed incredulously.

"Yes. Why not?" I returned calmly, "I will spend a few nights there."

"Oh, no, you won't," he replied with a faint smile.

"Indeed, but I will!" I exclaimed laughingly. "Wait and see."

"Willingly. But the house is not furnished."

"Never mind. I shall take Sharp there and tell him my intention, and he will have a room prepared for me in next to no time."

"Do you mean Sharp to sleep there also?" was the quiet enquiry.

"Certainly. No need to rough it more than necessary."

"Poor devil!" murmured George, *sotto voce*; but I heard it and laughed. George was really a fool on this one subject; and as to the ghost, of course it was all nonsense!

"You will not sleep two nights in the house, Jack," he assured me.

"I bet you ten to one I do," I returned carelessly.

"Done," he agreed.

"In ponies?" I suggested.

"By all means," he replied readily. "Only remember I do not consider it a fair bet, and it was your suggestion, not mine."

I laughed. "Well, it won't ruin me if I lose," I replied carelessly; "but I warn you I shall not lose it."

"We will see," was the unmoved reply.

## CHAPTER II.

AT about half-past eleven o'clock p.m. a few days later on I entered George Sortville's haunted house in M—— Square for the first time.

"Is it all right, Sharp?" I enquired, addressing my valet, who had just opened the hall door for me.

"Yes, my lord."

"Which room?"

"The one to the right, my lord. You mentioned a downstairs room, and there are only two; that, and a smaller one."

"Seen any ghosts yet?" I enquired with a smile.

"Not yet, my lord," was the perfectly unmoved reply.

"Nor shall we, Sharp," I rejoined lightly.

"No, my lord."

"But we may possibly find more than one burglar," I continued thoughtfully. "Have you got those revolvers here?"

"Yes, my lord."

"And seen that my orders as to the bolts were carried out?"

"Yes, my lord," said Sharp, and so saying followed me into the room which had been prepared for me.

The hall had looked very bare and dreary, but the room which Sharp had had made ready for my reception looked comfortable enough.

It was furnished; not unlike my bed-room in Jermyn Street, and all my things were arranged and laid out in it, as usual.

On the door were two strong bolts, quite new, and the windows were shuttered and barred in a highly satisfactory manner.

"You have the other room?" I enquired.

"Yes, my lord."

"And it is fitted up with bolts and bars as this is?"

"Yes, my lord."

"Very well. Then as I arranged we both shut ourselves in to-night and see what happens. I wish to be sure of my ground before I act in any way, and unless anything very unforeseen occurs, shall not leave my room to-night. I shall keep my ears open, though, and you do the same."

"Yes, my lord."

After that we parted for the night. I locked myself into my room, pushed both the bolts well into their sockets, and then proceeded to undress. I had taken every precaution ; but it was my firm opinion that nothing whatever would occur during the forthcoming night.

I put out my light as I got into bed. I had ordered Sharp to do the same. I was convinced that if we did hear anything unusual, it would be a burglar.

Not many minutes after I laid my head on my pillow, I slept.

\* \* \* \* \*

The clock on the mantel-shelf was striking one, when I woke with a start.

Dash it all ! Had I been dreaming, or was there somebody really moving about in the room ?

I held my breath, sat up in bed and listened !

There was something or somebody in the room ! Impossible as it seemed, it was so !

I lit my candle.

“Hollo !” I exclaimed, indignantly, “Who the deuce are you ? And what the d—l are you doing here ?”

I addressed an old man with a very wizen face and figure, who sat in an arm-chair by the empty fire-place.

He turned and looked at me. His glance checked the current of my wrath, and had a curiously cooling effect upon me generally.

“Lord Donnerton,” was the slow, distinctly given reply, “you are a very foolish young man. I am your best and truest friend.”

I considered this rather cool ; and said so.

“Cool,” he replied, with a shiver that made me shiver too, “It is cold ! Bitterly cold ! I am freezing, and cannot stay many minutes longer.”

“Come, that’s a good thing,” I returned, lightly, “but before you go, my friend, let me tell you, we must come to a clear understanding.”

“I hope so, Lord Donnerton,” was the grave reply. “Open the window, and then I will explain my errand here.”

“Not so fast, my best and truest friend,” I replied with a

laugh. "I can learn all I wish to know from you. Your friends may remain outside for the present."

"Does it not seem odd to you that I am here at all?" enquired he, in a low, peculiar tone of voice.

"Not in the least," I replied promptly. "The only thing that seems odd to me is that I did not look under the bed before I got into it."

"You flatter yourself, young man," was the sarcastic reply. "But the conceit of the present generation is surprising. "Do you know who I am?"

"Not in the least. But I mean to know before long," I replied, suppressing my anger.

"I will tell you. I am the King of the planet Vesta," he replied, solemnly.

"Have they only one king there?" I enquired in a would-be satirical tone; but by this time I felt certain that my ancient visitor was a madman.

"Only one," was the quiet reply.

"How long does it take to go there?" I enquired, politely.

"Only a passing second," he replied, glancing sideways at me as he spoke. "It is my wish to take you there."

This was getting serious. There was a method in his madness which was far from pleasing to me. Of course I was the stronger man of the two; but they say that sometimes lunatics have supernatural strength, and I did not particularly wish to have my throat cut.

"I cannot come to-night," I replied soothingly. "We will see about it to-morrow."

"Lord Donnerton," was the grave reply, "as sure as you are sitting there, to-night will see you in the planet Vesta."

"I'll be shot if it does!" I returned with decision, grasping my revolver as I spoke.

"I have spoken," was the unmoved rejoinder.

"Have you finished speaking, Your Royal Highness?" I asked calmly, still fingering my weapon of defence.

"Quite," said he; "unless you wish to hear more of the planet Vesta."

As a matter of fact I had already heard more than enough of the planet Vesta, but a curious sinister expression on his face warned me again that *pro tem.* I had better humour him.

"Tell me what you will," I said quietly.

"I have a daughter there," was the reply. "A daughter more beautiful than Venus, and with all the charms of Hebé, Minerva, Egeria and ——"

"Stop!" I exclaimed peremptorily. "That's enough! I knew none of those ladies personally, and, even to oblige you, really cannot stand any more of that twaddle."

"I was going to say Venus, Lord Donnerton, when you so unpolitely interrupted me," continued my tormentor in an exasperatingly calm manner.

"You mentioned her before," I reminded him impatiently.

"In reference to her beauty, Lord Donnerton," corrected my friend of the planet Vesta. "You may laugh at me and be as unpolite as you choose, it amuses you and does not hurt me; but remember my words, to-night you will see the Princess Naomi and you will worship her from that moment until your life's end as you have never before loved mortal woman."

I laughed. I could not help it! Irving could not have delivered that speech of his more impressively than he did, or looked more uncanny during its deliverance.

"I can stay here no longer," he continued presently, in a tone so feeble and far away that it quite startled me. "I must away! For the last time, Lord Donnerton, will you accompany me?"

"No, thanks," I replied firmly, but in a much more respectful tone.

Of course it was only a phase of his madness, but that strange alteration in his voice had really startled me more than even to myself I cared to own!

"As you will. Before an hour has passed we shall meet again. *When you wish to follow me raise your hand above your head.*"

"And then?" I enquired, trying to speak calmly and sarcastically.

"Then in less than a moment you will find yourself in the planet Vesta."

His voice quite died away as he said this, and the word "Vesta" was so indistinct, that had I not expected it I could never have made it out.

Then for the first time his eyes met mine! Nor could I take my glance from his, until I realised that he was visibly and unquestionably *fading away*.

His form grew more and more ethereal, until like a thin cloud of gauze it vanished from sight in a faint white mist!

Presently that, too, vanished, and I, with wide-open eyes and quickly palpitating heart, found myself alone!

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### CHAPTER III.

FOR a few minutes I sat there stock still.

To say the least of it I was very much surprised.

Perhaps for a second or two a cold, creepy, odd sort of sensation stole over me; but if it did I soon thrust it impatiently aside.

I had been fooled; hoaxed! Either by a burglar or my friend, George; and in either case I was fully prepared for my revenge.

I sprang out of bed; rushed to the door, found it bolted; tore off to the window, found it barred; looked up the chimney, received a shower of soot on my face; examined every crevice and corner of the room; peered under the bed, and then, finding absolutely nothing, sat down on my bed again and, must I own it, felt just a trifle queer.

I thought it over; but could make no better of it. What had happened? Who in the world was my old lunatic king? No answer could I find, either in my room or mind.

Then with a sickly smile I told myself that it was I who had fooled myself. I who had been the fool.

Of course it was only a ridiculous dream!

Dream or not it haunted me with a strange persistency, and word for word I began to go over again my conversation with my visitor.

I laid my head on my pillow; but tried in vain to sleep. Keeping time with the tick of my clock these words repeated themselves over and over again in my ears:

*“Raise your hand above your head——in less than a moment you will find yourself in the planet Vesta!”*

Presently came the inclination to raise my hand!

Fool! Idiot! Was I going mad too? Why should I raise my hand above my head?

Quick as thought came the reply. Why shouldn't you?

Yes, indeed! Why on earth should I *not* raise my hand above my head if I wished to do so?

But then it was such a childish, silly thing to do, and after all, why should I do it?

Ridiculous! Of course I was not going to make such an idiot of myself! Folly had carried me far enough already for one night, without my going any further in its footsteps.

I turned over twice, shook my pillow, and resolved with an iron resolution to go at once to sleep.

*"Raise your hand above your head; Raise your hand above your head; Raise your hand above——"*

"Dash it all!" I exclaimed angrily aloud.

*"Raise your hand above your head,"* came the monotonous reply in the same sing-song whisper.

"Shall I have a few minutes' peace in which to go to sleep, if I do raise my hand?" I mentally inquired.

"In less than a moment you will find yourself in the planet Vesta," came the reply, in unaltered accents.

"Confusion to the planet Vesta—Venus, Mars, Mercury and every other planet!" I returned, starting up into a sitting position again.

Then I laughed.

How more than foolish it all was!

Once again, and for the last time, I laid down in a resolute and highly determined manner.

*"Raise your hand——"*

With an enraged exclamation I sprang out of bed!

Foolish or not foolish I *would* raise my hand; it might put an end to my wish to do so!

Did I believe in the nonsense, that I should hesitate for a single moment?

But I did hesitate, and although during my hesitation I got into bed again, I was like the proverbial hesitator; I was lost.

At least, correctly speaking, I lost consciousness!

For exclaiming with an angry laugh, "Better in the planet Vesta, than bothered out of my senses here," I raised my hand.

And from that moment became unconscious.

---

## CHAPTER IV.

THE next thing I knew was that I was standing in a very wide street, on a very white pavement, between houses of a gigantic size and of exceedingly beautiful architecture.

The sun overhead shone brightly in an extremely blue sky; and I might have imagined that I was in some Continental capital, had it not been for the fact that I had been in every Continental capital there is and that not one of them resembled the town I was now standing in.

That explanation is worthy of an Irishman, but in no other way can I explain my impression of the place in which I found myself that night.

Sharp seemed to be standing at my elbow.

Presently, and almost before I had realised where I was, the sound of music broke upon my ears.

Down the middle of the street came at least a dozen young girls, dressed all in white.

They wore on their heads garlands of flowers, and each of them carried in her hand a small banjo decked with many coloured ribbons.

After these came what seemed to be a foot regiment; the men wearing old-fashioned chain armours. At their head was the band which had first attracted me by its music to the fact that this strange procession was passing by.

Was it a scene from a pantomime?

Surely that and nothing else!

Then came a dozen gentlemen in scarlet satin, gold embroidered cloaks, with waving white plumes in crimson caps; each of them mounted on a handsome, wonderfully well-bred looking black charger.

Those chargers caught my eye at once—but only for a passing moment.

For in their midst there was a small car, wrought of most exquisite filigree gold, drawn by eight white ponies, and laden with cushions of palest blue.

But it was not the car, nor yet the ponies, which caused me to

draw a long, deep breath and turn hot and cold alternate seconds.

No, indeed! for on those cushions with their azure satin covers reclined a very young and very beautiful woman.

Ah me! she *was* beautiful!

The procession all too soon passed by. How long I remained motionless there gazing after it, and then on the empty space it had left behind it, I cannot say, but suddenly at last I drew myself together and addressed Sharp, who still stood at my elbow.

"Who is that lady, Sharp?" I enquired impatiently.

"The Princess Naomi, my lord," was the reply, given in Sharp's usual respectful, utterly mechanical tone of voice.

"The Princess Naomi!" I repeated slowly; and for the first time I experienced a feeling of astonishment.

"Yes, my lord. The King's daughter."

"What king?" I enquired; but before it came I knew what the answer would be.

"The King of Vesta, my lord," said Sharp, in unmoved accents.

"Ah!" I murmured with would-be indifference; and then there followed a pause of some minutes.

"I should not object to having another look at that procession, Sharp," I continued presently. "There seems to be nothing else going on here. Slowish place, I imagine! Do you know where the procession is going?"

"To the palace, my lord. And if your lordship wishes it, I can take your lordship there in a few minutes," was the quiet reply.

"Which way do we go?" I replied, with a well-assumed lack of interest.

It did not strike me as being at all odd that Sharp should know the way; Sharp always knew everything; it was part of his business.

In a few minutes we reached the palace gates.

In the distance could be seen the royal procession, advancing towards us; and I drew back amongst the crowd of spectators near the palace gates as it drew nearer.

On and on it came; all too quickly. I was trembling like an aspen leaf as the car passed within a few yards of the spot where I

stood; but I raised my eyes, determined to again behold the Princess Naomi.

With a shock; such as I never before experienced; I realized that her beautiful, large, grey eyes were fixed solemnly upon my face!

She raised herself into an upright position, and with a quiet but imperious gesture, addressed the gentleman who rode nearest to her side.

Her voice was clear and musical as a silver bell, and low as it was its accents reached my ears.

"Stop," she said. "I wish to speak to the stranger!"

All eyes were instantly turned in my direction!

The gentleman thus addressed, instantly doffed his cap, and bending low over his saddle, evidently replied by a respectful remonstrance.

"I have spoken," was the quiet reply; and the glance which accompanied it exhibited surprised astonishment and displeasure.

Instantly I was informed that her Royal Highness the Princess Naomi wished to speak to me.

I glanced ruefully at my clothes; I was wearing a shabby old shooting jacket; one that I was much attached to, and that in consequence had long since seen its best days, and ought to have been discarded! My brown leather boots seemed to have assumed a tint quite six shades too light, and they were muddy and unpolished! My gaiters! Good Heavens! There was a button off one of them; and the other! the other was *not on*!

My collar seemed to be crumpled; my tie awry; and thus! thus!—with one gaiter on and the other off was I called upon to pay my respects to the young lady I loved! and that young lady was a Princess.

I cast a glance, which ought to have killed him, upon my valet, and then, with a crimson face, stumbled forward to my doom.

Arrived at the side of the car, I remembered that, however disgraceful my costume might be, I could at least behave like a gentleman.

I took off my cap, and with it in my hand, made a low obeisance.

"Sir," said my enchantress, in a low voice that reached my ears alone, "you are in danger here. My father is a magician. He lures strangers here to their own destruction."

I bowed again ; my very best bow. The Princess was divine ; but the situation seemed to have its disadvantages.

"Take this," continued the Princess Naomi, handing me a small bottle. "And the moment you drink it you will find yourself in your own country again."

What a dolt I was ! Why ; oh *why* ! could I not speak ? Why could I not thank her ? Why not tell her that I would die in the planet Vesta sooner than return to a world in which she was not !

And there was regret ! unquestionable regret in her accents !

"Do not grieve," she continued softly. "On the 16th of December, in the year 1888, we shall meet again."

And then she raised her head, bowed with courteous dignity and passed on her way.

---

## CHAPTER V.

"My lord," said Sharp at my elbow, "this gentleman begs me to inform you that he holds a warrant for your immediate arrest."

"That's awkward," I replied. "Tell him to come here and speak to me."

Sharp withdrew a few paces, and a gentleman, in a ridiculous blue satin, silver-embroidered coat, stepped in front of me. In his hand he held a paper.

He proceeded to address me in an unknown tongue.

"I cannot understand you," I expostulated impatiently (for the fact that all these fellows were so much better rigged out than I was, annoyed me). "Can you say it all in French or German, or—or—Latin ?" (I did not feel very sure of my Latin.)

He stared blankly at me for a second, and then resumed his conversation in his own tongue.

"He says that you must accompany him, my lord," explained Sharp, who seemed to know the language.

"Tell him I can't, Sharp ! I do not want his society in the least, and as to his holding a warrant for my arrest, that is all rubbish," I replied with rising ire.

Sharp and my friend in the blue coat held a hurried conversation.

"He says that when a stranger addresses the king's daughter, it is necessary that he should be beheaded, my lord," Sharp explained in soothing and apologetic accents.

"Oh, but that is all nonsense, Sharp," I returned hastily.

"He says it comes under the Beheading Act, your lordship," replied Sharp, in still more apologetic accents than before.

"Oh, one must draw the line at the Beheading Act!" I returned, indignantly. "I really cannot be beheaded, Sharp; and there the matter ends! It is asking too much of a fellow! Tell him so, Sharp."

Again Sharp conversed apart with the gentleman who held the warrant.

"He says that your lordship must be resigned. It is Kismet."

"Hang Kismet!" I returned, hotly. "And hang his impertinence! You see for yourself Sharp, that what he suggests is quite out of the question."

"Quite impossible, of course, my lord!"

"Tell him so, Sharp," I commanded, with dignity.

Sharp did so; but the result did not seem to be satisfactory. My friend was growing impatient at this long delay; that was evident.

It was also evident that if I remained in the planet Vesta, I should lose my head, whether I would or no.

I did not wish to lose my head. Better leave my heart behind me than my head! I saw that at once, now that it came to the point. So I raised the bottle the Princess Naomi had given me to my lips, and hastily swallowed its contents.

---

## CHAPTER VI.

As I did so a loud rat-a-tap-tap sounded in my ears.

I rubbed my eyes! Was I dreaming, or was I really in my bed? Was it broad daylight? And was that Sharp's knock at my door?

It was! I was not dreaming; I had ceased to dream but a moment since; and from beginning to end my strange adventure had been but a dream!

But how vividly had I dreamt it all! How plainly I could still

see my dreamland Princess ! How distinctly even yet sounded her low voice in my ears :

“Do not grieve. On the 16th of December, in the year 1888, we shall meet again !”

Never again would I meet my Princess Naomi ! Never again ! She was but a dreamland Princess ; but in my breast she had left a blank, cruel regret.

Foolish as it seemed, the impression she had made upon my mind remained immovably there for many weeks and months afterwards, and it was not until a year had passed that I could have truthfully averred that I had “got over” my dreamland love affair.

As to George Sortville’s house, Sharp and I slept in it for about a fortnight, and not a sign of a ghost or a burglar did we see in it.

I proclaimed far and wide that the ghost-story was totally unfounded, and before long it was let and inhabited.

And now to the *really* strange part of my story.

I had left the year 1887 behind me, and with it eleven months of the year succeeding it, when I received a pressing invitation from my brother, who was quartered at Muddleton, to run down there for a night or two, and attend the ball which his regiment the —— Hussars were giving on the 16th of December.

*The 16th of December, 1888 !*

I laughed at the remembrance of how important that date had once seemed to me ; and then ended my laugh by a faint, long-drawn sigh.

For my Princess Naomi was still in memory rather dear to me !

I accepted Charley’s invitation, and the 16th of December found me at Muddleton.

That same evening I was standing rather apart from the crowd in the Muddleton Assembly Rooms, when suddenly my glance fell upon a girl—a very young and beautiful girl—dressed all in white.

For a second or two my heart stood still, but to bound off into wildest palpitation !

I seemed unable to move—seemed turned to stone with the excess of my surprise and my agitation.

For there, in the full glare of the gaslight in the Muddleton Assembly Rooms, stood my Princess Naomi.

For quite half an hour I did not dare to approach her; then I gathered courage to ask Charley who she was. Charley laughed.

"Oh, so you are captivated, too, are you, Jack?" he replied, jestingly. "Why, that is old Lord Blessington's only daughter. She is only just out, and a tremendous heiress. Introduce you? Well, I suppose I must; but her little ladyship has admirers enough already, so do not let hope flatter you."

A minute or two later I was bowing gravely to my Princess.

"My brother, Lord Donnerton—Lady Naomi Hilliard," said Charley, and then left me stranded and utterly bewildered.

I conclude I behaved like a Christian, and came out of the situation fairly well, for shortly afterwards I was swinging round the room with my Princess in my arms.

We paused under a huge palm tree, and I insinuated that there was a comfortable seat close to us.

With a childish grace Lady Naomi sank down into it; and as soon as I was seated beside her, turned her lovely face towards me and with a grave questioning expression in her large grey eyes, met my glance.

"*Have* I met you before?" she enquired doubtfully. "I think so. I seem to know your face so well."

"Perhaps it is like my brother's?" I suggested quietly, but with a wildly beating heart.

She shook her head. "Oh, no," she replied, positively. "Not at all! I feel sure that I have seen you, and yet cannot remember where."

The temptation was more than I could withstand.

I was mad surely to do it after half an hour's acquaintance, but I leaned forward and whispered gently:

"Was it in dreamland, Lady Naomi?"

She did not rebuke me!

She bent her lovely face low over her bouquet, and a faint exquisite blush sprang up into her cheeks.

I was reproaching myself bitterly for my thoughtless speech when she glanced up and laughed.

Such a natural, childish, unaffected laugh it was!

“It was,” she replied, with evident amusement. “How very, *very* foolish!”

“It is *not* foolish,” I replied, earnestly. “Not at all foolish. It is Kismet.”

I said no more that evening. Perhaps it may be said I had already said too much.

But that is surely my concern, and mine only. For my Princess Naomi is now my wife and Queen.



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